

sceen

magazine for digital extravaganza

FMX/05 PREVIEW ISSUE:

BREAKPOINT 2005, MACHINIMA REVIEWS,
JOHN PAUL BICHARDS GAME ART "EVIDENCIA,"
NETLABELS, "SHIZZLE" POKEMON MINI HACKING,
I-AM-8-BIT ...

SCEEN

FMX/05 PREVIEW ISSUE



for more information contact the editors
<team@sceen.org>

SCEEN PREVIEW ISSUE

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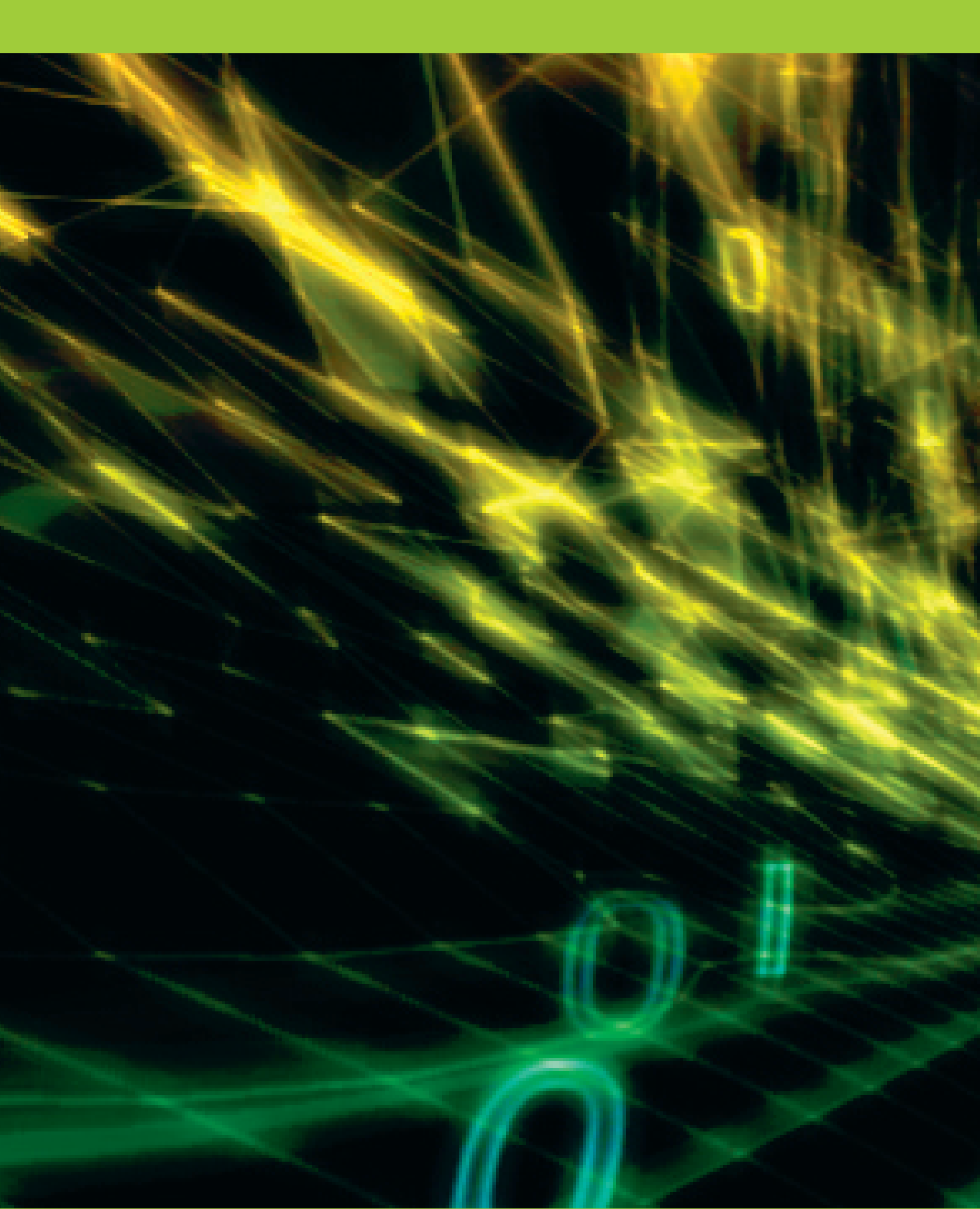


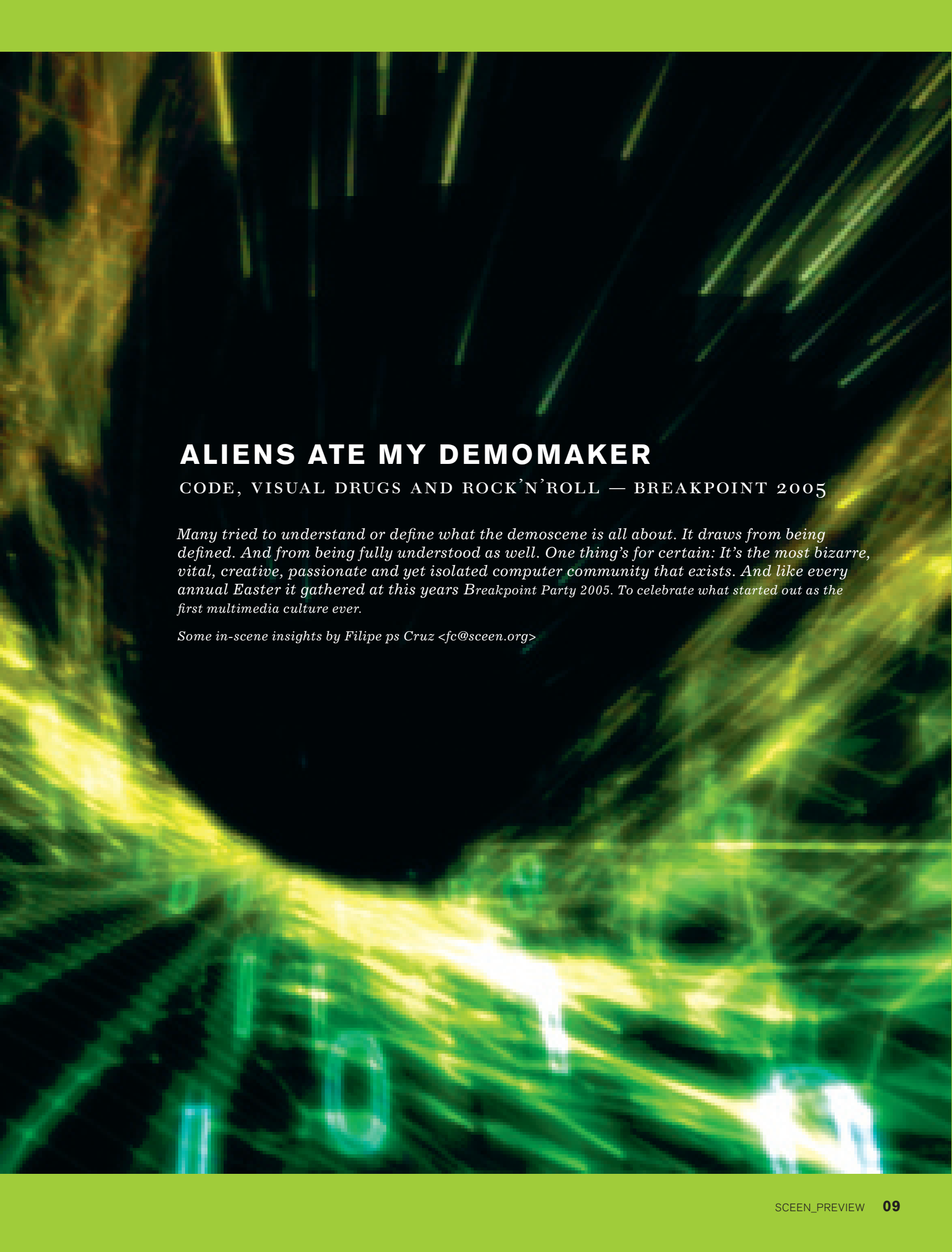
ROCKING IN 8-BIT

found by Matthias Kretzler <mk@sceen.org>

Now that's what we've been waiting for! After the success of independant electropunkbands like Egotronic or Räuberhöhle, who are using senior C64 computers and SID-style vocoders to drop their more or less political statements, the soldering of the world's very first Amiga 500 guitar, which is actually being played live on stage, was nothing but a logical consequence.

"I wanna be a rockstar", says André Plümer, the man behind "Ender Error". "I don't know how play a guitar, but I can track music. Since rockstars do need a guitar I had no other choice." Therefore samples of electro guitars are beeing played live from the keyboard while pre-tracked drums and vocoder samples of the Amiga goldie "Say" supply the mixture. Hardcore! You can even book this guy under www.no-budget.knup.de!





ALIENS ATE MY DEMOMAKER

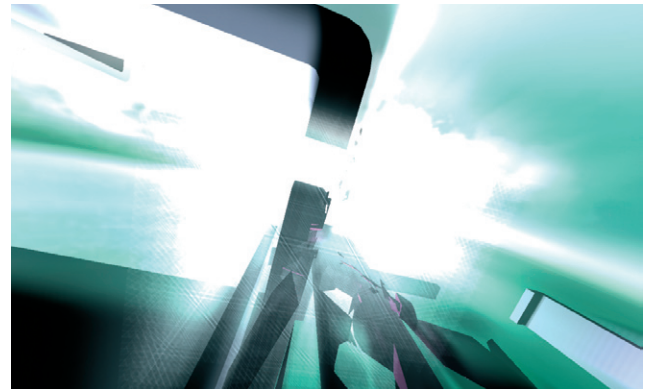
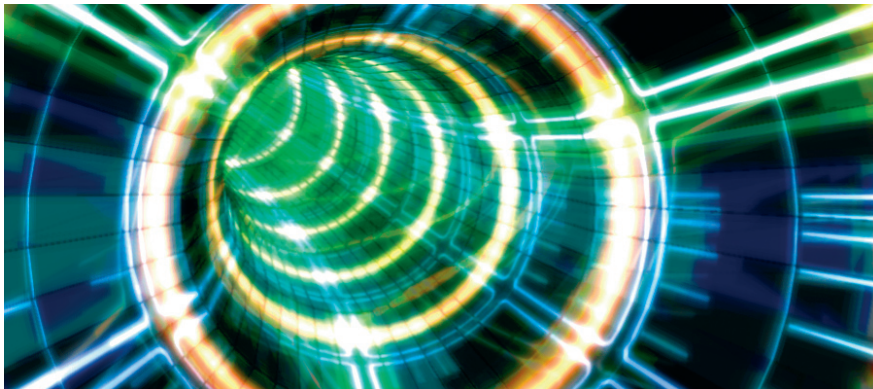
CODE, VISUAL DRUGS AND ROCK'N'ROLL — BREAKPOINT 2005

Many tried to understand or define what the demoscene is all about. It draws from being defined. And from being fully understood as well. One thing's for certain: It's the most bizarre, vital, creative, passionate and yet isolated computer community that exists. And like every annual Easter it gathered at this years Breakpoint Party 2005. To celebrate what started out as the first multimedia culture ever.

Some in-scene insights by Filipe ps Cruz <fc@sceen.org>



Easter has long since been demarked as a haven for the religious holidays. The happy citizens of this world gather with their families to pursue ancient rituals in modern days. To purge their communitary sins, establish new bonds, reforge the union of their clan. That's why we, the barbaric horde of computer nerd weirdos commonly referred to as demosceners, gather in the nice city of Bingen, Germany every year. To pursue our own set of ancient bonding rituals, passed on to us by the oldskool elders, to spread the love and friendship with our brothers and sisters - well, mostly brothers - and show them how much we have grown this year. We gather our loved ones from lands near and far: Canadians, Portuguese, Spaniards, Frenchies, English, Dutch, Swiss, Italians, Hungarians, Poles, Latvians, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Suomi and a few Germans as well. We missed the Russians, they ran into some trouble attempting to get their visas this year.



Feature preview

SCEEN writer and demoscener Filipe Cruz introduces Breakpoint 2005 and the demoscene. Read more about the releases, competitions and newest real-time trends in our first issue to come.

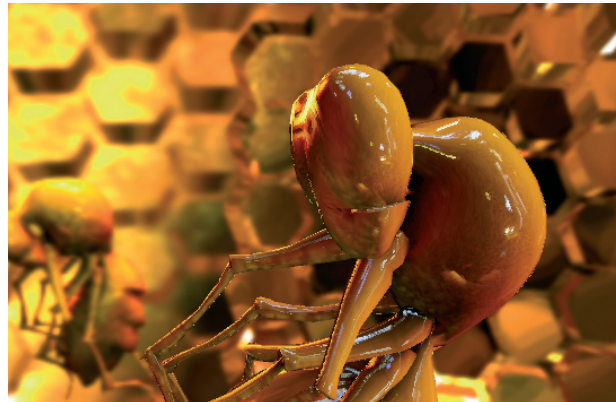
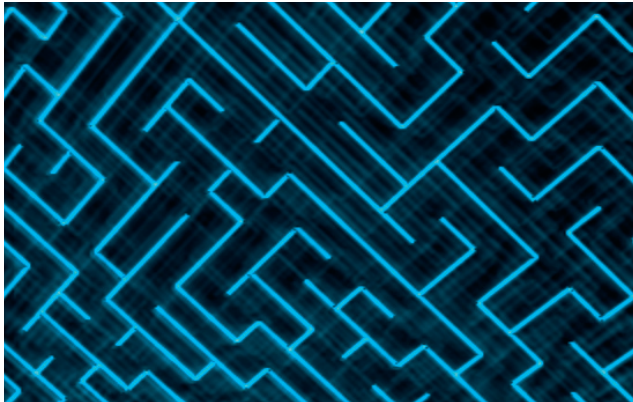
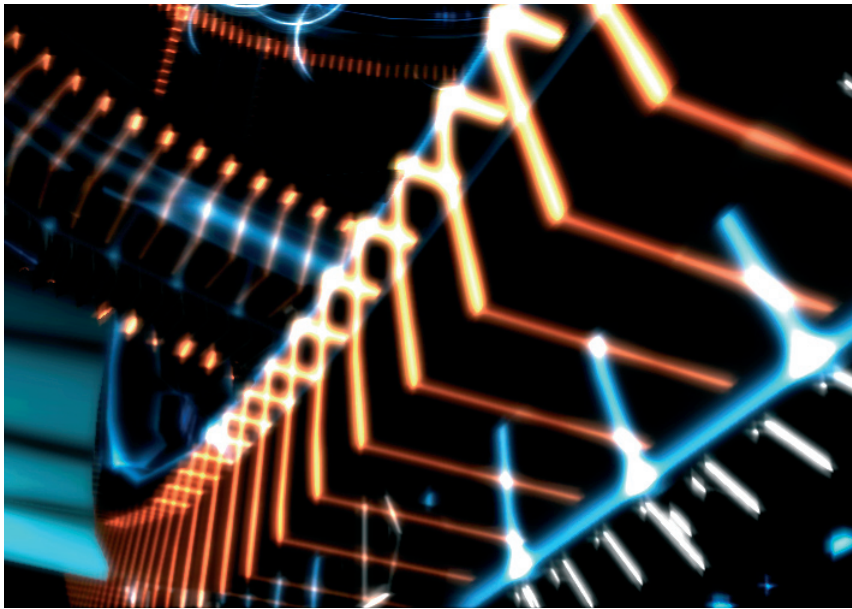
The original purpose of our religion was to explore technology, to push the machine to its extreme limits. Make it do more and better than your rival coder, faster speed, less size, smoother looks, fresher design, anything that would show the rival cracking team who had the most skills, the leettest connections. As new machines emerged the processor power increased and accelerated 3d graphics cards became standards, cracktros evolved into megademos, beacons of technical excellence and artistic creativity.

We are demomakers, we live immersed in a real-life cacophonous roleplaying game, the rules are many but unwritten, dangers plenty and hard to contour, to be known and respected requires never-ending proofs of excellence, creativity, originality, compassion and immense determination.

Demoparties like Breakpoint is where we meet to compare those qualities through participation in several com-

petitions that are set out to measure the acceptance of our abounding excellence and overwhelming creativity by the general attending audience.

Our gods are normal people just like you and me, they are musicians who became 64k intro coders, graphicicians re-occuringly insulted for pursuing an own style, coders vividly engaged in discussing blur optimizing technics, retired crackers giggling about their glory days with the ascii makers, musicians who can make your brain orgasm with 8bit sounds. People whose work we so often watched and listened at home in a dark room with a disturbingly hypnotic monitor glow, work whom we so dearly worshipped and envied to death, are now rolling drunk in the wet grass or passed out in the bathroom. How can such incredibly talented people be so disgustingly human? disgustingly fragile! I watch them recover from horrible hangovers, deliver some entry for the competition and then



Maximum overdose

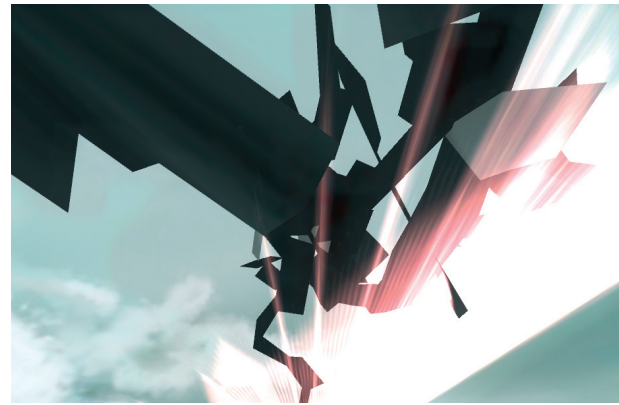
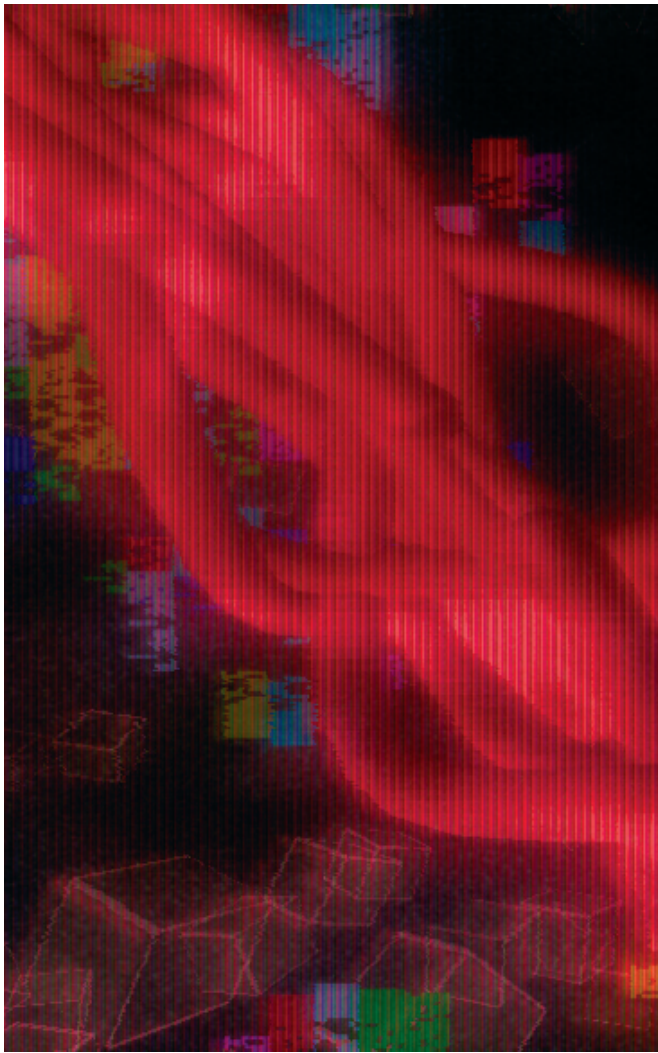
The demos released at Breakpoint 2005 in the various categories couldn't be more diverse: From the minimalistic and abstract to effect-shows and oozing photorealism—all kept in 'real-time'.

ask for currywurst in the pizza&pasta foodstand. A few hours later they are discussing the intricacies of the different SID chip model filters, why the specs of gameboy advance makes it a much cuter platform to develop for than the dreamcast, the influence of glitch IDM in modern scene trends, why the original shaft series are better than the movie, and the reasons why „paul the penguin“ is a much better chiptune from Radix than „unreal superhero“.

The portable boomboxes scattered through the beer garden shift from the commando theme, to iron maiden, daft punk, the legendary ABBA Yolk+Legend remix for Hyperventilation, and back to some more Jeroen Tel SIDs. Yes, we are disturbed computer nerds! And damn proud of it too! We smile at each other and headbang with our fists held up in the air while the sun finally starts piercing through the shabby grey clouds to warm the cold wet

grass at our feet. We idle with style waiting for competitions to start.

Sitting in front of the bigscreen consumes most of your time at a demoparty, but that's what we are supposedly there for so we usually do it—unless we're too drunk to care or be let inside the hall again—but that's what we are there for: to get our hard work shown on the bigscreen, maybe have someone sneak up on you and shake your hand or pat your shoulder, smile in a shy way and ask „was that yours?“ „uhu..“ „cool stuff! i liked it! well done!“ That's what we live for, knowing we managed to deliver it, hearing the claps when the production ends while we sit there helplessly embarassed. In those short few blissfull moments that we share watching the demo on the bigscreen for the first time, having a beer with your friends, someone sitting next to you might have - maybe just this once—been able to understand it, like it, pos-



sibly enjoy it, acknowledge you do got some skills, a tiny glimpse of talent, that you cared to share it, that you still bother trying to make and release something.

To assist the attending sceners in the hard task of keeping sober until the main competitions, the Breakpoint organizers ensure a tight interesting schedule throughout the day, to that extent this year they invested heavily on live acts and technical seminars.

Live events

The 'party' in 'demoparty' usually doesn't need extra boost. Still there were four live-act bands performing at Breakpoint, giving the event the right twist:

David Hasselhoff Big Band, from Finland, played among many other: a reggae cover of Kraftwerk's The Model; The Knight Rider theme; and an amazing live interpretation of the legendary demo Dope by Complex, which incidently managed to get everyone in the hall humming along.

BASS, from all over the world, they assembled for a one off performance interpreting rock soundtracks from famous modern demos. And if you never thought a demo soundtrack could make full grown men headbang their heads off and stagedive, think again.

Ultrasound, from all over europe, played a set riddled with legendary demoscene and tracked scene songs including Guitar Slinger from Moby/Sanity, Second Real-

ity theme by Purple Motion, Rob is Jarig soundtrack and a very special cover version of Unreal Superhero.

Pornophonique, from Germany, with a guitar, a game-boy and what appeared to be a porno flick played in 8bit textmode on the bigscreen, they mostly delivered a bizarre set of EBM flavored chiptunes that got everyone smiling and dancing.

Curious?

Breakpoint 2005 was complex. And it deserves an editorial feature just as sophisticated. Expect a full flavoured round-up with all the facts, details, trends and subcultural backgrounds on Breakpoint 2005 and the phenomena, that's so hard to grasp: The demoscene, in our first issue.

Links:

<http://breakpoint.untergrund.net>
www.scene.org
www.pouet.net
www.ojuice.net

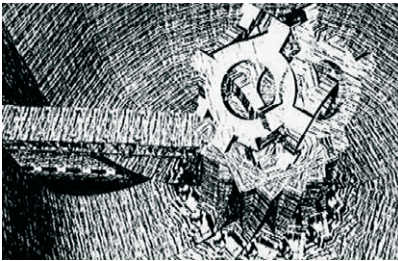
WHAT'S SO SEXY ABOUT 4K?

Pimp 4k! To make people understand the demoscene simply refer to the 4k intro releases: In what is usually smaller sized than an empty (!) Microsoft Word document demosceners squeeze whole 3D animated audiovisual clips—from the abstract to the frivolous. How that works? Mad coding skills and compression algorithms out of this world. Relics from the early days of the demoscene, when filesize was crucial to fill vacant blocks on floppy disks. In times of computer resources beyond any needs filesize becomes en vogue again. Seemingly bored by current hardware power demosceners find their extra challenge in microscopic releases, from 4 to 64 kilobytes, more than ever. Breakpoint 2005 proved it. 29 productions for PC, Amiga and C64 were released in this category, most of them being of incredible beauty and quality. Here's a succinct selection of what nifty coders created with only 4096 PC bytes—or, in other numbers, just 32768 times deciding between one or zero! (*mk*)



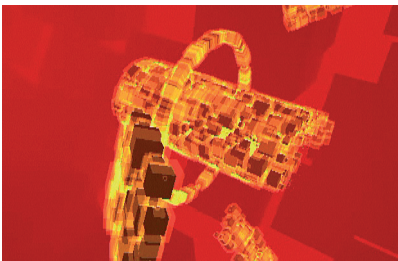
Parsec by Frenetic, R0k and Sonic (Ranking #1) – PC

It's worth the effort of installing the proper version of DirectX (9.0c redistributable for software developers, February 2005) to watch the competition's winner "Parsec" by Frenetic, R0k and Sonic. The coders take you on a 3 minute flight through space, showing the milky way, earth and a solar eclipse in unbelievably detailed textures. The experience is moreover completed by a spheric soundtrack.



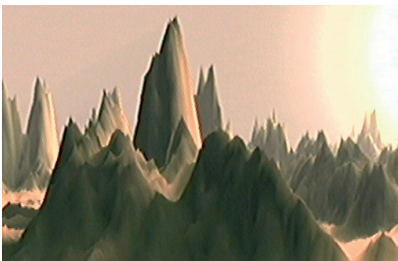
Panoptikum by Caladox (Ranking #2) – PC

Rank two, "Panoptikum" by Caladox works with a strong visual gimmick: Leaving colors and gray scale completely aside a complex three-dimensional world of 1bit color opens up, taking the spectator on a tour through a factory place. A stylish walk-through showing halls, machines and structure.



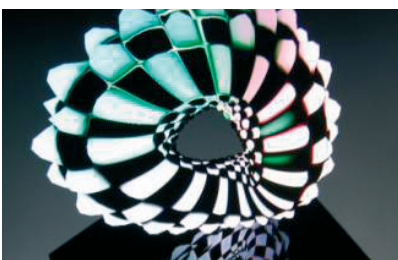
Chorrera by Fuzzion (Ranking #5) – PC

The guys of Fuzzion reveal a dark side with "Chorrera". A soundtrack hardly exists, therefore the whole attention is drawn to the visuals. Like most intros, this is a very abstract production, containing of blocks which are flying around in science fiction formations.



Scheintal by Mostly Harmless & Checkpoint (Ranking #9) – PC

Ranked 9th far behind, this intro attracts attention with a beautiful digital sunrise that, literally bit by bit, is flooding an artificial valley, thriving with some sweet reticent melody. Eventually not a technical breakthrough, yet simply beautiful.



Rainmob by Nebula & Matt Current (Ranking #6) – PC

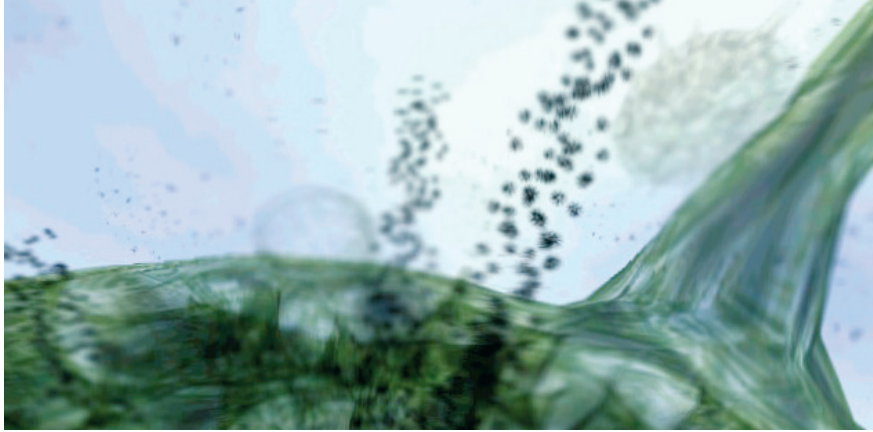
Nebula and Matt Current unleash some beautiful shapes, colors and reflections in this one. A bizarre object pulsates, glows and transforms into a new even more bizarre object.

BITFILM FESTIVAL 2004

A DEMOSCENE PREMIERE

by Alexander Scholz <as@sceen.org>

Flashback: The Bitfilm Festival in Hamburg, Germany, was the place to be for digital art and motion graphics from November 3rd to 7th 2004. For the first time ever the organizers added demoscene real-time productions to the category cast. We talked to Ekkehard Brueggemann aka Steeler of 'Digitale Kultur e.V.' about this premiere, it's background and potential.



How do you like the concept of Bitfilm Festival?

Bitfilm receives a broad public attention and kept growing over the last few years. 2004 was the first time we participated as representatives of the demoscene. And as a demoscene institution we are happy to increase public attention to productions coming from it. The concept of Bitfilm reflects a broad variety of different styles of expression with digital media arts and I think that's what makes the festival interesting for us. The unique way the demoscene expresses its creativity and skills fits perfectly into the concept of a widely focused festival.

Demoscene productions shown at the Bitfilm Festival for the first time: How did it happen? And who made it possible?

It was my ex-roommate Werner who had been in touch with Aaron Koenig, the main organizer of Bitfilm. He talked to him about the demoscene and introduced several productions to him. And they really liked what they saw. I was writing my final exams at the time when Werner asked me if I could help out with Bitfilm. I forwarded him to our organization 'Digitale Kultur e.V.' and Aaron got in touch with Tobias Heim. Tobi organized the partnership and managed to get the demoscene into the festival.

The demoscene was basically the first multimedia culture ever. Ironically it was the last to find its way to the Bitfilm Festival, premiering in 2004. Why is that?

1st: demoscene real-time art has always been very technical. Coders and even pixlers are 'technicians' first and then artists. To understand the productions (and the creativity and work behind them) you need a broad knowledge about what happens inside a computer. Not many people have such deep insight. This also reflects in the symbolism and language the demoscene evolved as subcultural code. Similar to the graffiti scene. The

reason why public attention is growing is because nowadays demos also LOOK much better visually and are not focused on one certain style anymore. Also they begin to somehow understand the 'real-time' aspect of demos which basically makes the biggest difference to 'common' digital arts.

2nd: the demoscene enjoys itself and doesn't really aim for public awareness. That surely doesn't go for all demosceners but in general sceners like to be among themselves, communicating to people who understand what they are actually doing.

Do you think that events such as the Bitfilm Festival combining a wide variety of multimedia arts might be an additional path to go for the demoscene to represent its art and culture?

Definitely—if there's a chance to communicate what makes these productions so outstanding and what the scene is all about. A demo without a small introduction about the different approach in expression and realization doesn't make much sense for a public audience. Technology is the key to the demoscene and has to be communicated along with the demos.

Demos are hardly self-explanatory. What is usually the hardest thing to understand (or explain) about the complexity of demos to a non-scene audience?

Probably the technology behind small sized intros. Also the way how a demogroup works and the real-time aspect of demos are also very interesting issues to talk about with a public audience.

The Bitfilm crew chose the demo productions shown at the festival up to their own standards, digging the archives of pouet.net. Are you satisfied with the selection?

Sure we're satisfied. It's not the Scene.org Awards where standards for nomination are much different. As a conventional film festival they chose the demos rather from a filmmakers / producers perspective.

Any other categories you really liked or even caught yourself impressed by? As demoscener, I mean?

The Flash category had some great productions and there were Machinima videos, that impressed me as well.

Closing question: Will the demoscene also be present at the Bitfilm Festival 2005?

I guess so. :)

The Bitfilm Festival 2005 will take place November 2nd to 6th at the Mandarin Kasion in Hamburg, Germany.

MEET THE DEMOSCENE AT FMX

HUMAN COMMUNICATION

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THROUGH
LIMITS

COMPUTERGENERATED VISUALS & AESTHETICS

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GROUP
PRODUCTIONS

CODE

ELECTRONIC MUSIC

PARTY

REALTIME

RAYTRACING



**AND
LISTEN TO
THE LECTURE**

Code, Visualdrugs and Rock'n'Roll
Geschichte(n) der Demos und der Demoscene
Fr, 29. April 2005 - 16.00 Uhr - Raum Reutlingen

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photos: Verena Grupp & Hendrik Stöteler

NETLABELS

A SECRET REVOLUTION OF MUSIC DISTRIBUTION

by Moritz Sauer <contact@phlow.net>

The global network of the WWW has rattled both the industry and music scenes quite a bit over the last few years. Thanks to the silent boom of internet labels, highly advanced mixing software and the availability of cheap web space, a secret music revolution is underway ...

Welcome to the post CD era: Music downloads from the web (legal and illegal) flourish, “mp3” belongs to common knowledge and people walk their “harddrives to go”, portable mp3 music player with Gigabytes of music. Music has never been more virtual. And music lovers never spent less money on it. Albums and EPs seem to become a dispensable concept, restrained to serve as promotional tool for musicians. Netlabels work the same way: They distribute music of their portfolio artists exclusively on the web—but free of charge, free of commercial constraints and free of scandals. And a prospering Netaudio subculture comes with it. A vital music community that has its roots in the days when there was no ‘Net’ yet.

First there was the format ...

Karsten Obarski started it. With the development of the sequencer tool “Ultimate Soundtracker” for the Amiga computer in the late 80ies, he made the electronic exchange of digital music possible. Now computer freaks were finally able to arrange their own 8-bit samples onto four tracks. All you had to do was put the samples on separate tracks like notes, and the program would set them to the right pitch—letting you compose melodies. Similar

Between ,kitsch‘ and the Aphex-Mix

The probably most well-known netlabel “Monotonik” was the first to jump on the MP3 bandwagon. In the days when ISDN was pure luxury, many modem users felt excluded—despite the fact that everybody else approved of it as the next step in sound distribution. Music-wise Monotonik continues to focus mainly on IDM (Intelligent Dance Music) and their back catalogue has grown to include up to 1.3 GBs of MP3s. From smashing break beats in the way of Squarepusher & Co to melodious opulent songs by lackluster, Monotonik’s favourite export, there’s a lot to be discovered. Sometimes even a “4 on the Floor”.

Rise and fall of the MP3 portals

In 1997 we witnessed the victory of the MP3 portals, with *mp3.com* leading the way. While stocks were having their heyday due to the internet, mania *mp3.com* offered a great promotion tool to its artists. In addition to a free account, musicians could upload as many songs as they wanted and were free to maintain their own artist page with bio, pictures and discography, if available. Thanks to immense technological developments, *mp3.com* later even offered the chance to sell CDs ‘on-demand’. Artists

could pick from the *mp3.com* catalogue to assemble their own tailor-made CD, including art-

“I like netmusic because I’m keen on the idea of delivering artists music free of charge to people who love to hear it.” [in] **Janace / www.subsource.de**

to “Rebirth” or “Reason”, the songs were saved as .mod (short for module) files and included all song-data of the tracks, notes in patterns and sounds as samples. Due to their small size, these songs could easily be copied onto a disc and shared with friends or fans. Usually the .mod files were loaded into the Ultimate Soundtracker again—offering insight into the songs’ structure and dynamics. This module format worked just like open source.

... and then came the wire

Due to their small filesize, the wide-spread use of .mod files just couldn’t be stopped. Especially from 1990 on, when the BBS mailbox scene flourished, musicians and fans exchanged their favourite .mods via telephone cables. With the appearance of the internet, a whole new way of communicating and distributing became available. Around 1997/1998 the first netlabels were founded and you could download .mod music for free. The FTP server ftp.scene.org, especially, was the source of such music – and still is. This gave quite a boost to the early netlabels.

Along with the constant and unstoppable spread of the MP3 format also came the slow demise of the old-skool trackers. Although you can still find many fresh .mod and .sid files (the C64 sound format) on the net to play with tools like winamp, musicians and netlabels were drawn to the better MP3 sound and continued to distribute their songs in this format till today.

work. Internet surfers and fans were able to order their own CDs, pay with a credit card and have them delivered to their home.

But the bubble didn’t last. Money ran short, a lawsuit filed by the music industry weakened the oversized portal and massive lack in quality scared off music lovers.

Portal vs Netlabel vs Record Label

mp3.com was sold long ago, the artists have all left and similar portals like besonic.com or vitaminic.com have begun to lose their charm only to be slowly being replaced by netlabels. Reasonable prices for web space, together with high internet traffic, offer the ideal conditions for music distributors behind privately held labels. The support of FTP servers, such as *www.scene.org*, and the integration of MP3 files in the web archive at *www.archive.org* also allow almost limitless distribution of download-intensive MP3s.

Similar to record labels, internet labels provide family-like structures and a clear focus. Portals, on the other hand, work like major record labels – and by distributing genres and artists at either end of the spectrum (and everything in between), they lack their own identity. That’s why they’re unable to efficiently promote their artists to a target audience, which is something both record labels and netlabels succeed at since within their structure and ideology both focus on a rather specific audience. This ap-

Links:

www.phlow.net
www.netlabels.org
www.interjump.com
www.de-bug.de



mo.'s favourite Netlabels:

www.tokyodawn.org
www.hippocamp.net
www.miasmah.com
www.realaudio.ch
www.thinnerism.com
www.subsource.de

mo.'s netaudio favorites ep/lp

1. Sudio — Soulstrip [www.ideology.de]
2. Cuebism — Circles EP [www.ideology.de]
3. Lukas Nystrand — The Fruit Of Hard Work [www.tokyodawn.com]
4. Various — Light House Apartement [www.miasmah.com]
5. Batfinks — Peach Route EP [hippocamp.net]
6. Marko Fürstenberg — Gesamtlaufzeit [www.thinnerism.com]
7. Mentz — Relocate EP [www.tokyodawn.com]
8. Benfay — One Touch Button Music [www.thinnerism.com]
9. Paul Keeley — Rocky Mountain Funk [www.epsilonlab.com]
10. Emilsson — Another [www.heavy-industries.net]

proach enables new artists to easily merge into the back catalogue. Plus, netlabel newsletters tend not to feature spam-like advertising, but relevant information. The only significant differences to a regular 'brick & mortar' label: no contracts, no obligations, no physical releases and not much money is made apart from merchandising, contributions and concerts.

HiFi is Paramount

An advantage to being a netlabel is the chance to release even the most obscure material, since there's no money to be lost. The cheap storage in virtual space offers unlimited room for experiments of all kinds. Sure, an experiment can still fail. The lack of quality is reason enough for the audience to never come back. The next universe is just one click away. Quality is absolutely crucial.

Just a question of format ...

Netlabels can now set the sound quality level to 192 kbps. Still, there's the question of the format: MP3 or the open source format OGG Vorbis? Free minds who go for OGG have to deal with the fact that they're also excluding a certain audience. DJs working with mixing software like Traktor cannot work with OGG. Also, most MP3 players' hardware can't deal with the free format. So distributing MP3s or both seems to be the best strategy.

... and in the end emails come from Chile

The internet connects, stimulates exchange, offers a potential audience of millions and supports the concept of netlabels simply. The rest is just fame, which can be discerned from the click and download rates that reflect taste, interest and audience appreciation. And with fame comes fan mail from all over the world. In the end, music wants to be free. And if it's good enough it'll go everywhere. Word up!

Netaudio 2005

2005 started out pretty lively. In the beginning of the year Netaudio05 took place in Switzerland. Hosting the event in the Dampfzentrale in Bern, the swiss team of www.starfrosch.ch gathered artists, labels and friends of the netaudio cosmos from all across Switzerland and Germany. The result: Fruitful interaction, creative exchange, a lot of Laptop music and a thrilled audience.

Taking Netaudio interaction one step further, www.netstockfest.net premiered with an exclusive line-up of Netlabel artists. Using open-source streaming servers to transmit addictive audio data from places and studios from all over the world, musicians and DJs shared one virtual space—and filled it with netaudio music. An international event that went both ways, since the listening audience' feedback to the live-sets flipfopped 'live' through set up chat-channels. Sounds nerdy? No way: Martin Wisnowski, head of www.2063music.de, and his friends streamed straight from the University park—having a wonderful "sound-picnic".

Netaudio future

Telling from the continuously growing Netlabel Catalogue (www.netlabels.org), the Netaudio culture is simply going strong. A fact that might even increase interest of commercial music labels, still dealing with dying audio formats like the CD and recovering from the struggle of virtual music distribution.

Overall a clearer separation of plain 'hobby' and serious Netlabels is expected. Since besides the "free music" credo and fame within the scene, commercial success of their committed artists is utterly welcome. Generating successful artists is certainly something the whole Netaudio culture benefits from. So stay tuned.

Moritz "mo." Sauer

is freelance journalist, web designer and DJ. He's editor-in-chief of the e-zine www.phlow.net, an acclaimed portal for music and web culture, maintains the Netlabel Catalogue (www.netlabels.org) and has been involved in the Netlabel scene for years. Along with Marcel Kamps he hosts the download radio show "digital Phlow" (www.phlow.net/dp/)

NETLABEL CHECK



www.epsilonlab.com



www.2063music.de



www.phonocake.org



www.subsource.de



www.stadtgruenlabel.net



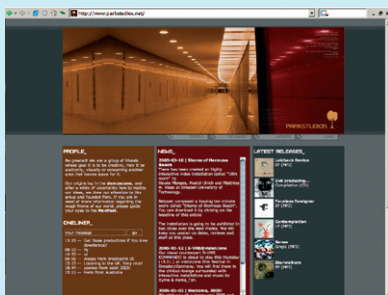
www.thinnerism.com



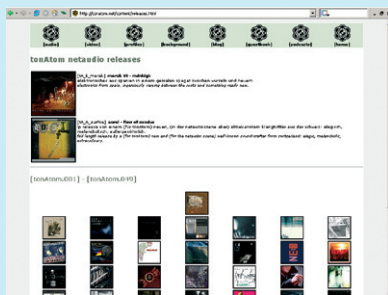
www.tokyodawn.com



www.interdisco.net



www.parkstudios.net



www.tonomat.net

TALKING TO MONOTONIK

by Hendrik Stoeteler <hs@scene.org>

Founded as an outlet for talented electronic musicians in May 1996, *Monotonik* has released over 300 tracks from a variety of talented idm-ish electronic musicians from all over the world, including such artists as Lackluster (DeFocus/Merck), Bogdan Raczynski (Rephlex), Sense (Neo-Ouija), Tim Koch (Surgery/DeFocus), BrothomStates (Warp), Proem (Merck/Hydrant), Fun Tourist (Worm Interface/Sony Finland), Vim! (Surgery/Oggum), and many more.

Also Monotonik and its sister breakbeat sublabel *Mono211* have been featured in „Spin“ magazine, have soundtracked a Sony Playstation game, were invited exhibitors at the Ars Electronica festival in Austria, have been played out on radio stations from Australia to Slovenia, featured on a Webby-nominated weirdass radio station, and have had hundreds of thousands of downloads of their tracks.

We talked to Simon Carless (a.k.a. h0l), ex-demoscener, netmusic veteran and the mastermind behind Monotonik [www.mono211.com].

After nearly a decade, what motivates you the most to be still active in the netlabel scene?

Giving away great music for free. That's the simple answer. The long answer would be: there's plenty of great music out there that won't make millions of dollars for the creators, or necessarily even get much exposure. If we can give it away for free, and raise the creators' profile so that they have an opportunity to sign with a real-world label too if they wish, then that's wonderful.

Monotonik releases varieties of electronic music like Breakbeat, IDM or Melodic Electronica. Did you ever have a certain 'style limitation' in mind, or are you open to every musical style?

The styles of Monotonik have changed and morphed quite a lot over the years, but only in the same ways that other labels have. Mo' Wax was influenced a lot by acid jazz when it started, for example. Having said that, we are still very open to all styles, but tend to love melodic electronics and beepy retro sounds the best. Hence, the current label styles.

What's so fascinating about the good ol' old-skool bleep sounds which always played an important role in Monotonik releases (Vim or Heatbeat, for example)?

Well, I personally grew up as a musician in the Amiga demoscene, where artists like Heatbeat and Vim were contemporaries (or respected figures, if you prefer!). Now that they're still making amazing music in that style, there's no reason not to keep releasing it and telling people that

this type of music still works, even if the technological boundaries have been swept away. Plus, it rocks.

Some of the Montonik artists originally came from the demoscene. Are there still connections there?

We started out as an all demoscene group, though, and now that the demoscene is rather infirm and elderly, we simply use it as a touchstone.

Conventional musicians normally aspire to a record deal. What is a netlabel artist's highest goal?

Well, they just enjoy having their music listened to, played on the radio and being in the company of other good artists. Often they have day-jobs or are students – and they like making music and having it distributed for free. They'd like real-world distribution too, in stores, but they often get that with other small real-life labels.

You're also curator of the world's biggest netlabel archive. How did it come to the collaboration with Archive.org exactly?

I started volunteering with Archive.org in early 2003, helping with their collections of classic software (since I have a background in the software/game industry), and since the non-profit organisation was already hosting live music concerts, they wanted to test other individual collections. So I uploaded Monotonik's material, and then we discussed adding more netlabels and subsequently started the netlabels section!

Was it an unavoidable development to start with the netlabels collection after running Monotonik for quite a few years?

It was just a lucky coincidence, really. The Internet Archive wanted to help host and preserve freely available audio and video, and I had access to a lot of people looking for somewhere to preserve their netlabel collections.

Can you explain the idea behind Archive.org a bit?

Archive.org was founded in San Francisco back in 1996 by a guy called Brewster Kahle. It aims to preserve human knowledge in digital form, and has about 10 to 15 full-time employees based in the Presidio of San Francisco. It's famous for the Wayback Machine, which preserves the internet in webpage form back to 1996 or so, as well as its large audio, video and text/book collections. It has many, many terabytes of storage space in its two data centres in San Francisco and Amsterdam, Holland.

How does the collaboration with the hosted netlabels work?

Anyone who signs up for a collection gets their own unlimited collection space to upload their freely distributable, ideally Creative Commons-based, releases and get them automatically 'derived' into streaming and MP3/OGG versions.

How is the archive funded? Who pays the fees for the immense demand of web space?

The Internet Archive is funded by various charitable foundations – it's a true non-profit, and is funded by several sources including the Sloan Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation (think HP!) and the Kahle/Austin Foundation. It also works with various national libraries to help them archive the websites for their particular countries, and that also helps the Archive support itself.

What do you think about complaints that the netlabel scene is getting too complex and the releases are often average quality nowadays? How can newbies keep on top of things?

Actually it's starting to get quite difficult, and I agree that this is a problem. What the netlabel scene needs are more English-language (or local language!) weblogs talking about particular releases and why they rock – as well as more netlabel mixes, more top tens and the like. It's starting to happen, though.

What can we expect from Monotonik this year? Which trends/developments will you retrack in the near future?

We'll just keep releasing good music in no particular order. :)

Your assessment: where will the netlabel scene be 5 years from now?

I think the netlabel scene will continue to flourish as more people get broadband and discover that free music can often be just as good as music they pay for. However, it will definitely continue to focus on niche genres that do not sell massively in CD/vinyl form.

Is Monotonik a full-time job? What do you do in 'real life' exactly?

I live in the Bay Area in California and work in San Francisco as editor-in-chief of Game Developer magazine (gdmag.com) and Gamasutra.com which are dedicated to video game development. I used to be a videogame designer for PC and console in both England and out here in California. So Monotonik and the Archive's netlabels are a great hobby for me, but not what I do for a living.

Closing question: Which netlabels do you like personally?

All of them! But in particular One, Please Do Something, Kikapu, Observatory Online, Comfort Stand, 8bitpeoples and Webbed Hand.

Links:

<http://one.dot9.ca>
www.pleasedosomething.com
www.kikapu.com
www.observatoryonline.org
www.comfortstand.com
www.8bitpeoples.com
www.webbedhandrecords.com



Simon Carless
Head of Monotonik
(this picture was
actually taken with
a Gameboy cam)



DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING!

JOHN PAUL BICHARD'S EVIDENCIA SERIES

A once-bustling street in the centre of London is frighteningly still. A motorbike accident has changed the scene to a macabre 'set' during rush hour. The familiar surroundings give way to a sterile room where forensics is reconstructing the past event with routine precision. Every detail is a potential clue, every little thing suddenly gains importance. This experience has triggered a series of art exhibits and photos by John Paul Bichard who shows us a completely different type of crime scene in his Evidencia Series—the 3D Shooter.

by Klaus Neumann <kn@sceen.org>

Violence in videogames isn't considered a crime, but is rather an element for creating the atmosphere, says John Paul Bichard. With enormous speed, a player slaughters his way through an entire army of enemies, without ever having to suffer the consequences. As we know, he doesn't have to. After the player's reached the next level, all evidence of his crime has vanished. John Paul Bichard thwarts this by bringing the remains into the real world. Evidencia #000 shows body parts in urban settings which is typical of shoot-'em-up videogames. Large amounts of blood are evidence of the violence that has raged through this city. In Evidencia #001 we see a close-up of a field where cartridge cases are strewn everywhere. Evidencia #002 is a photo exhibit that shows the entire virtual crime scene.

What is it about the real and virtual violence that you find so fascinating?

John Paul Bichard: I feel it's problematic to talk of videogame violence and violence in the real world in the same way: if I was punched in the mouth by a random person walking past me one morning, I would be far more shocked and it would have a vastly greater impact on me than mowing down 300 'enemies' in an evening's videogame session. A few days ago I read about a US soldier who executed an injured civilian in Iraq after a mistaken

attack on the victims' vehicle which left the driver dead and the civilian badly injured. The soldier decided to execute the injured civilian to prevent him from suffering, but without calling for a medic or administering any first aid. I could argue that something like that is far better as a fantasy in a videogame – others would likely argue that no one should even be considering such an action. Violence is complex and has been around for as long as people have communicated and exerted power over each other. I'm fascinated by the way that videogames allow a fantasy of violence to be constructed and played out without the need for responsibility or the 'inconvenience' of consequence. The questions my work asks are: What if there were consequences in a videogame? What if you could be traced, if you could be made responsible for your actions?

Responsibility for a virtual crime. Evidencia is supposed to bring forensic methods into a virtual setting. Where's the connection between both worlds?

I'm not sure that there's any direct link. What appear to be similarities are constructed as a result of my understanding of real-life crime analysis, not my experience of it. I think the biggest differences between the two worlds are, in particular, tempo and uncertainty. In reality a crime scene is likely to be a confusing mass of potential clues,



some of which are dead ends, and some of which are red herrings leading to months of painstaking analysis, data collection and processing to reach conclusions. In the videogame there are few objects to explore, the events are relatively simplistic and there's always an imperative to keep the player moving, to keep him stimulated. I think most players would simply stop playing if it took them, for instance, four months to crack a drugs ring by painstakingly gathering evidence, going under cover and keeping surveillance on suspects' homes.

In the first two exhibits, you've carried the virtual crime scene over into the real world. In Evidencia #002, The White Room, you haven't even left the crime scene yet. What do you see as being the difference?

Evidencia #000 and #001 were intuitive, very personal and direct confluences of my ideas in the real world, they were very playful and both surprised me. The White Room, was methodical: I played Max Payne 2 through three times, kept track of the places I found interesting and used cheats and modifications to construct scenes and explore viewpoints before capturing and outputting the imagery. In the White Room work, I wanted to play with notions not only of the consequence of violence-after-the-event in games, but also the validity of the photoshoot and my relationship to the 'real' space encountered in games. The White Room was originally going to be a Max Payne 2 level, playable in the gallery, but I rejected the format as too exotic in a photographic show about interiors so I decided instead to use the game space that I know so well as a real space in which to take a photo shoot.

What were the visitors' reactions to the series?

John Paul Bichard: The whole Evidencia series has stimulated a host of reactions ranging from delight, surprise and fascination through to anger derision and disgust, but no direct threats of violence. The reaction has been very different, largely dependent on the context within which it was viewed. People who saw the physical installation Evidencia #000 at the gallery were very quiet and reflective – most didn't really know what to say and those that did found it fascinating, repulsive or curious. It surprised people but not in a sensationalist way as it was very 'still' and melancholic. Despite the gore, the piece stimulated reflection. The same work online has attracted a far wider range of responses and opinions. There were thousands of hits from sites in Japan and Russia that focus on gore, disasters and ghoulishness. The response from online arts and design communities has been great, with a fair bit of debate and interest particularly on the relationship between the game and the real space. Reaction from the games community has been mixed. A lot of gamers are suspicious and perceive me as a rip-off artist – and accuse me of using games for my own ends which I find puzzling as I've played videogames since the early 80s and have spent much of my professional life exploring, designing and developing games. My daughters think the piece is great.



JOHN PAUL BICHARD has exhibited work in Europe, New York and London. Recent exhibits include an installation at the International Digital Games Research Symposium 'Level Up' in Utrecht, the Netherlands, an online residency with Variablemedia www.variablemedia.info, and a first-person videogame on the ISEA 2004 ferry in the Baltic Sea as part of the ICOLS arms fair www.icols.org. Bichard also exhibits at the Quadrum Gallery in Lisbon www.galeriaquadrum.com.

John Paul Bichard's website: www.hydropsia.org/john



Above: Evidencia #001 Other: Evidencia #002

Machinima
The Journey



Machinima review by Klaus Neumann

The Journey / Person 2184 by Friedrich Kirschner

The winner of the Make Something Unreal Contest (MSUC) in the category ‘best non-interactive film’ tells of routine, inflexible paths in life and how to escape them. In *The Journey*, a Machinima in the unusual style of a comic, we experience the emancipation of a stick figure who wants to resist the mainstream and go his own way. The wonderful, storytelling style and the melancholic music make this film one of the best Machinimas to date. Unfortunately, the visual style is also the reason why the film is rarely shown at festivals in the Machinima category—the technology behind the film is too indiscernible.

Friedrich Kirschner continues with this style in his new work. *Person 2184* also has its own visual language that merges 2D elements into 3D surroundings. As in *The Journey*, the first part of the series thrives on the dense atmosphere and interesting setting.

Valuation: Trend-setting Machinimas that also have to equal classical animation films.

[The Journey won first place for best non-interactive film at the MSUC. Were you surprised?](#)

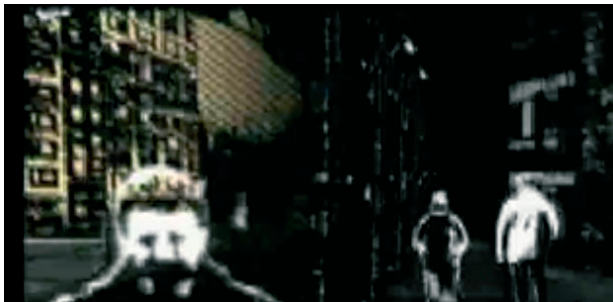
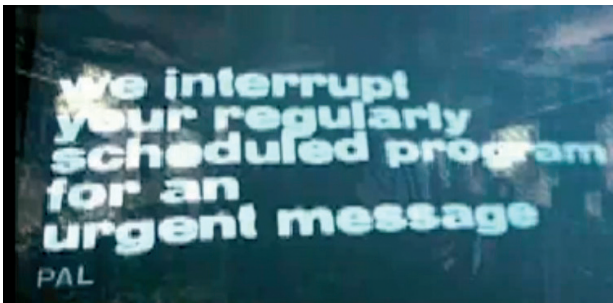
Friedrich Kirschner: Yes, very. I was absolutely convinced that bot would win— simply because he plays with the topic Unreal Tournament in an exciting way. Plus, I never win anything. Well, one time in first grade I won a paper airplane contest. But nothing like this. I never would’ve thought that I’d win first place.

[What inspired you to create The Journey?](#)

My little cousin Aaron. He was a year-and-a-half old when I created the film. I wanted to give him something that he could enjoy at the age of six just as much as at 20. It’s funny, though, how the film tells itself somehow. After all, most people accept computer games as they are without seeing what can happen when you wonder off the beaten path. And it really was about creating something completely different than the average shoot-up films.

[The film’s visuals are also unusual. First, you decided to use the unconventional medium Machinima and then, in addition to that, an unusual graphics style. Why Machinima and not simply a pure character animation?](#)

I chose Machinima because the technique and creative possibilities are fascinating. Unfortunately, computer games and the technology behind them are hardly discussed at all. If they were, maybe more people would no-



Machinima
Person 2184

tice what sort of brain work and technology is behind it all—and how the technology can also be used to create terrible games sometimes. For me it was about showing what's possible with this technology apart from the well-known and established art. Plus, I never could've created the film quicker in another program, as far as I know. Machinima is fundamentally more intuitive for me than traditional animation films. It's more like making movies for the big screen, talking with the actors and teaching them new techniques.

Do you see a chance for Machinimas to equal films produced in other ways, even for an unprepared audience?

Yes, absolutely. I think the winning films at the MSUC are good examples of that. They show that it's possible to tell nice stories in this way. Machinima is an expansion of the existing 3D-animation palette. I don't think it has to hide itself behind some high-resolution rendering because the artistic requirements aren't less, just completely different. People also understand that a film that's been made with digital video cameras doesn't necessarily look worse than a Hollywood blockbuster—just different.

To get back to MSUC. The first prize was \$25,000 which is an unusually high sum for a Machinima competition. How does a competition like this influence the Machinima scene?

The competition's most likely led to the production of a few good Machinima films. But I think we still would have seen this film even without it. The competition motivates you and sets a timeframe which can be very helpful if you're working from your own initiative. I think the prize money is a bit much, though. The message to the outside world is: There are established festivals where films—which people have spent half their lives working on—win and all the creators get is some awkward trophy, a thank-you and maybe \$1,000. I just worked on a project for two months and earned the average annual wages of a tradesman. I'm certainly not complaining—just being honest.

You also publish the *Machinimag* magazine. What fascinates you about Machinimas?

If you think of how some of the most intelligent people in the world develop graphic chips which are then used by other highly intelligent people, as well as all those people who can afford to spend their time shooting at virtual characters, then it's completely logical that you just have to love every remote artistic debate about this stuff!

The Journey website / download:
www.machinimag.com/journey/

Machinimag by Friedrich Kirschner
www.machinimag.com



Machinima review by Klaus Neumann

Engine by Tomislav Bezmalinovic

In *Engine*, Tomislav Bezmalinovic has created a Machinima that draws on a computer game's already existing artwork. However, instead of monsters or soldiers, machines take the leading role. In sync with soft electronic sounds, pistons turn, thunderbolts whiz through the air and metal blocks clink against each other. When players go on a monster hunt in the horror-shooter *Doom 3*, the camera remains still to focus on the death. Cut with precision and set to music, an unfriendly, cold world opens up where machines methodically follow an unmanageable plan. In *Engine*, Tomislav Bezmalinovic has created an ingenious film-remix of a computer game that goes far beyond the original. A true Machinima.

Valuation: A clever remix of a game that couldn't be more independent.

Where did you get the idea for *Engine*?

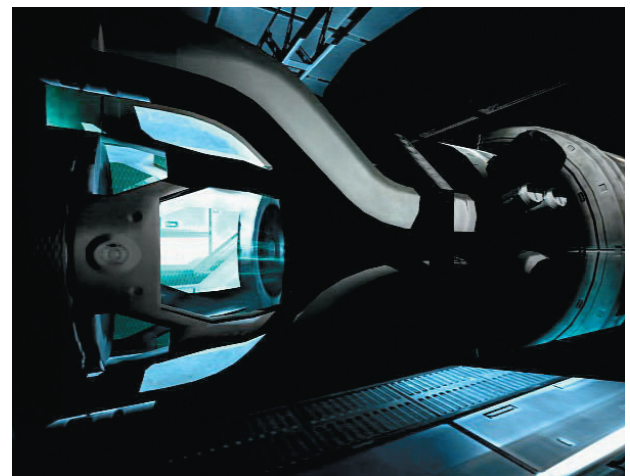
TOM: I discovered Machinima as a medium, including the Machinima community and everything that goes along with that, shortly before I started working on *Engine*. Until I came across machinima.com, the word Machinima was foreign to me. At that time I was playing *Doom 3* on my notebook and had the idea to produce a sort of audiovisual performance from the machines and their sounds.

But what is it about the machines that fascinates you?

I recently moved to Basel, Germany. Sometimes, when I walk through the city, I stand in front of Tinguely Fountain and watch the machines that continuously work and only come to rest in the winter. For a videogame to be accepted as a work of art, aside from the talent needed to produce it, you also have to place the game or a part of it into another or larger context. When I see the beautifully crafted machines in *Doom 3*, the borders between game and art blend together for me—and not just because they're nice to look at, but because they can symbolise a number of things. They could symbolise the eternal and unchanged, the senseless wear and tear from work, the steadfastly working organism called the human machine. In addition to all this imagery, we shouldn't forget a machine's stimulating images and sounds. On the one hand, it's the determination and straightforwardness, and on the other hand, it's the continual repetition of the rhythm and movements that appeal to the human ears and eyes.

It seems as if the music was specially made for the visuals. What role did the sound play when you were designing the images?

My work often begins with music which also sets my creative spirit loose. During my school years, I recorded two albums of experimental, minimalist music with a mate of mine. This experience deepened my connection to the



music of Clicks & Cuts—and this was the same music that inspired Engine and its images. Since I didn't have the time to compose something on my own from the machine samples, and inode has much more experience in the electronic music field than I do, I asked them to do the arrangements for me.

How long did you work on Engine?

I had a good two weeks for the entire project. After I had saving games for every machine at the beginning of the first week, I began to record situations from various angles via the demo function. In the second week, I had already planned to spend five days with a friend on a retreat in the mountains. Since the cutting was supposed to take place in the second week, the machine sequences had to be finished by the end of the first week. I spent the rest of the week, day and night, typing in rendering commands into the console since it wasn't possible to automatically compute a hundred demos in a row. At night I slept for 30 minutes at a time – and on Monday morning, after 80,000 rendered sequences, compressed to 263 screenshots, I was quite tired, to say the least. In the second week, when I was in that type of quiet, isolated village which offers the ideal conditions for concentrating, I began the real production process of cutting. While there, inode sent me their musical compositions plus graphics of the arrangements via 56k modem, and here you could recognise which

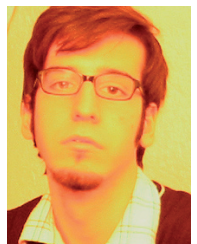
machine samples were used parallel to the newly entered sounds. This was important because I had to know which machine sequences to cut to the music. I then began to set selected fragments of inode's music to the images. By the end of the week, I had about 20 sequences with coordinated image and audio which still had to be put into the correct order. To answer your question: I spent about 40 hours cutting and 20 hours applying saved games and recording demos.

That's almost three times as long as it takes to play the game completely through. Do you think the average computer gamer even realise the time and effort that goes into the games?

I've noticed that computer gamers' senses are much more attuned to digital spaces than someone who's playing a first-person shooter for the first time. The newcomer moves diffidently, almost feeling his way along the walls, and fails to notice the attention made to details and complicated special effects. Just as there are good readers and good art appraisers, there are also good computer gamers who can bring extraordinary amounts of individualism, new perspectives and ways of thinking into digital landscapes and spaces.

Download Engine at Machinima.com

<http://www.machinima.com/films.php?id=946>



**Tomislav
Bezmalinovic**



SHIZZLE!

RUMBLING WITH 4 MHZ

by Nico Barbat <nb@sceen.org>

What makes 1000+ people cheer at a microscopic Pokémon Mini console? Even the Europe-based TEAM POKéMé was utterly surprised by the audiences' reaction when they screened their production "SHizZLE" on the hacked mini Nintendo platform at Breakpoint 2005. We found out about the thrill of limited possibilities—and how to take it to extremes.

Changing technologies, changing times

Escalating clock speeds, bombastic polygons and uncountable colours. While glossy x86 PCs and hyped game consoles fight for the throne of high-end digital home entertainment, there are still numerous code fetishists out there who go crazy on bizarre and vintage hardware platforms—and earn respect from the interested public and underground scenes. Each year, for example, loads of demoscene groups grind out nifty productions full of highly optimised codes, graphics and sounds for all those dusty machines like Commodore 64, Amiga, Atari ST or Spectrum ZX—and they know no creative boundaries despite the hardware’s technical limitations, which are only broken in the end anyway. At Breakpoint 2005, a solely demoscene event, TEAM POKÉMé took this passion to another extreme. Their demo production “SHizZLE” not only won the so-called “real wild competition” (category for game console platforms), but also ended up as the event’s most acclaimed and celebrated release.

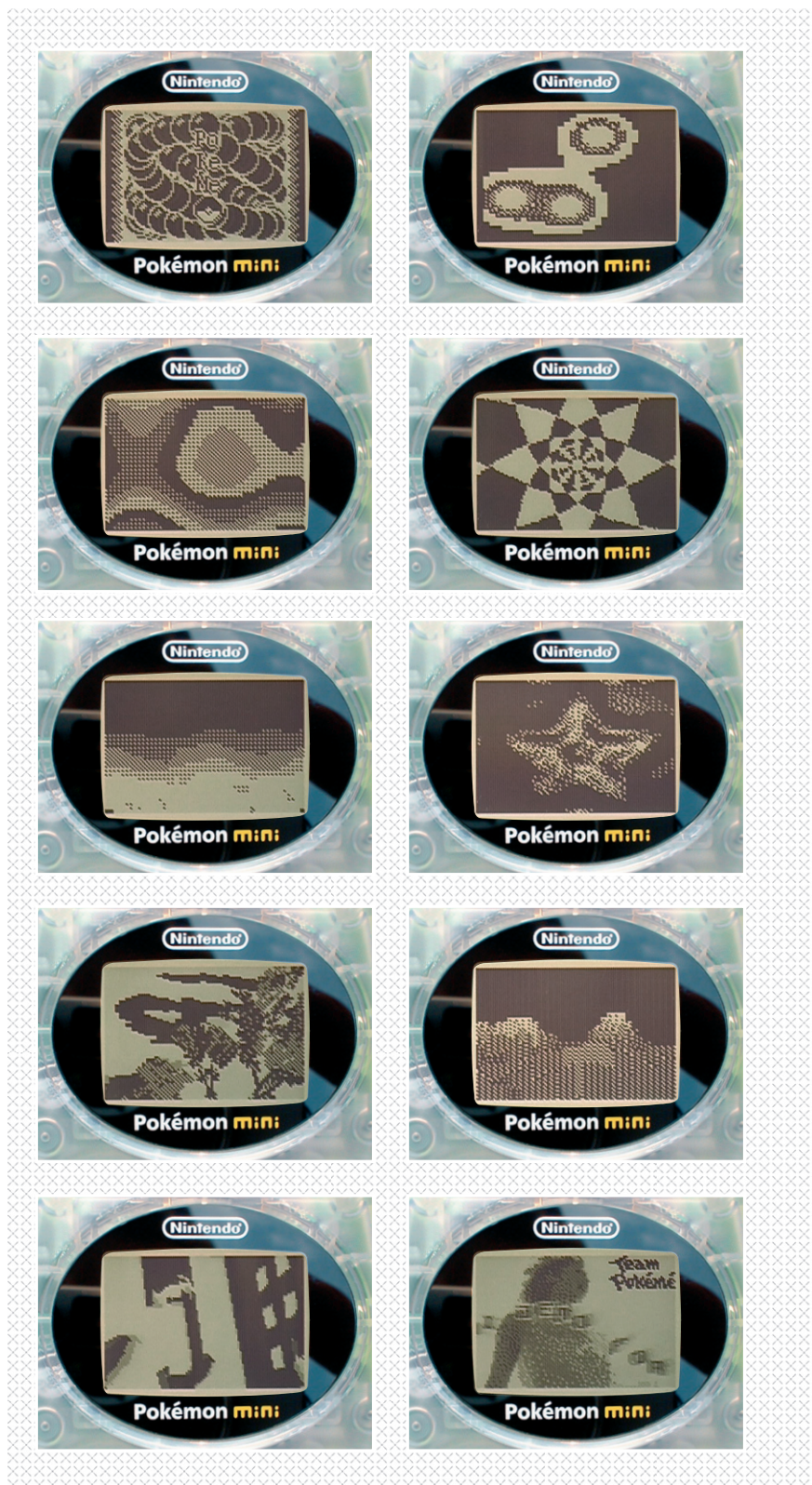
Exploring new worlds

What’s so special about SHizZLE? Certainly not the name. It’s the technical backend: the demo runs on a hacked Pokémon Mini, the world’s smallest portable game console from Nintendo and which was launched back in 2001. Packed in a 74 x 58 x 23 mm plastic case, which is available in green, purple or blue, the mini console mainly appealed to the youngest group of buyers below the Gameboy consumers—plus it attracted demosceners by its microscopic scale and features. It would prove to be a real challenge for hackers and coders. The console consists of a 4MHz 8-bit CPU by Nintendo, forcing the external programmer to create his own assembler solution. The system’s core is rounded out by 4096Bytes of RAM and an up to 1MB-sized ROM. The output takes place on a 2 x 3 cm monochrome LCD with 96 x 64 pixels, and the sound is created by a timer-controlled 1-channel frequency generator. As an extra, this cheap handheld offers a real-time clock with stopwatch function, an infrared sensor for wireless data transfers and a shock sensor to register external movement—as well as a rumble motor for good vibrations.

SHizZLE, sizzle and nothing to grizzle

SHizZLE, as you can see in an AVI video which you can download from the TEAM POKÉMé website, offers everything you’d expect from a retro demo. Starting off with the logo, the production features, blob effects, dot landscapes, sinus dots, a ‘vector’ tunnel, moving objects, text scrollers, a lense effect and a zoom rotator. A highlight is certainly the ‘second reality’ 3D flyby sequence, which plays homage to a demoscene classic by Future Crew from the early ’90s. Credits and greetings are frivolously presented with a video animation of a ‘booby girl’ looping in the back. What better way to end these 6 minutes and 13 second than with some notorious rumbling and the nifty message, “You can’t do this on Xbox”.

You think this is cool? Wait till you hear about how it was made. As a matter of fact, there aren’t any software



“SHizZLE” by TEAM POKÉME

Hacked, reverse-engineered and refilled: A Nintendo Pokémon Mini running “SHizZLE” was not just winner of Breakpoints “real wild competition” (category for game console platforms), but also ended up as the event’s most acclaimed and celebrated release.

development kits or programming manuals available for the Pokémon Mini. The team had to reverse-engineer the complete system and generate its own development environment from scratch. Thrilled guests at Breakpoint even referred to SHizZLE as the “mother of all hacks”. We talked to p0p, the founder of TEAM POKéMé, about the development process and the sizzle behind SHizZLE.

“It has cartridges! It needs to be hacked, and homebrew stuff has to run on it.”

Looking at oversized PCs with 3+GHz and all those furious consoles, it's refreshing to see a real-time demo on such a piece of low-end hardware. Still, most people might ask: Why?

To be honest, I'm a real retro freak. My favourite handheld is still the GAME&WATCH from Nintendo, and I like my Amiga 500 way better than my new, really fast PC. Doing obviously impossible things on old-school or crappy hardware satisfies me more than doing eyecandy on new power machines. I bought my first Pokémon Mini more than a year ago when I realised that it used cartridges. “It has cartridges! It needs to be hacked and homebrew stuff has to run on it”, was my immediate reaction. I wanted it to have a place in the handheld homebrew and emulation scene forever.

After you decided to hack it, how did the programming and design go? What was technically necessary to develop this demo, given there are no manuals and no coding platform?

The project itself was very complex and intense. It took us about a year to discover the Pokémon Mini hardware, and we had to use logic analysers and FPGAs (Field Programmable Gate Arrays) to get the first real dumps. You have to know that Nintendo not only designed a custom CPU, they also used custom maskROMs for their cartridges. We were real lucky that some weeks after we got stuck with the dumps, but no idea what kind of CPU we were looking at, Nintendo released a Pokémon Mini emulator as part of the Gamecube game “Pokémon Channel”. By disassembling and debugging the game in real-time, we learned the opcodes used by the Pokémon Mini, and DaveX came up with an assembler to produce the first homebrew game SOKOMINI which is was able to run inside Pokémon Channel. At this time (summer 2004) we had the idea to do a demo for Breakpoint 05. Of course, we started just four weeks beforehand. Lupin was the main person. He came up with the first real-time tunnel effects and did the framework for all the other effects. We used DarkFader's PMAS assembler and asterick's MiniMon—those programs combined are a really good developing platform. Manuals are provided by asterick and JustBurn, by the way, and we appreciate new people trying their luck on this little bugger.

So how many people took part in the hacking of PM and the coding of the demo all together?

The main people in the hacking project itself were DarkFader from the Netherlands, JustBurn from Portugal as well as DaveX and me from Germany. The SHizZLE demo was done by Lupin, dox, ph0x, me (p0p), Orion, and some graphics were done by ravity—one screen by GBADoctor and one screen by rack. The music was done by Fridge. Fridge is a well-known DJ and techno-trance artist. This makes five coders, three graphics artists and one musician. That's a bunch of people, and it was done in very little time. The demo itself was not at all optimised, but at least we finished it at the party—Lupin coded 13 hours on Saturday at Breakpoint.

What to expect from TEAM POKéMé in the future?

I formed TEAM POKéMé with the single purpose of hacking the PM. So there are no other projects we are working on as a team, but I can tell you, for example, that DarkFader has just hacked the Nintendo DS, JustBurn is building his own console (the “BitCrappy”) and doing stuff for the Sega Dreamcast, and I'm looking at TI calculators at the moment. I'm still fascinated by the PM and will probably do more stuff on it later. Lupin is programming P-Type (a clone of the classic shoot-'em-up R-Type) at this very moment.

You've described what your team's doing now and in the near future—so where do you see the demoscene in, let's say, five years from now and beyond?

It will probably be harder to run homebrew stuff on newer systems—demo coders will need to rely on or be hardware hackers themselves. But there will still be all the lovely Amigas, C64s, Dreamcasts and all the other retro stuff. But it'll still be the demoscene showing the armies of professional programmers what they could be doing with their platforms if they only had a little more enthusiasm.

Are you working as programmer in real life too?

Well, I'm working for a company that does measurement for mobile phone networks. That's quite nice because I professionally get to hack new beta stage phones, solder stuff to it, do some coding, etc., and we have an excessive amount of hi-tech equipment. Personally I dislike C++ and enjoy assembly language much more, which kind of disqualifies me from the professional programmer scene.

SHizZLE!

Further reading:

TEAM POKéMé: <http://pokeme.shizzle.it/>

SHizZLE: <http://pokeme.shizzle.it/infos/Videos/>

SHizZLE_winning_demo_BP05.avi

Breakpoint Party: <http://breakpoint.untergrund.net/>

LOWTECH SHOES FOR HIGHECH PEOPLE

by lektrogirl <lektrogirl@lektrogirl.com>



If you haven't come across it yet, *micromusic.net* is the world wide web famous online/offline music community with over 10,000 registered users across the planet who are drawn together with a love for the lo-fi: "obsolete" computers and toys, sound chips 8-bits and pixel graphics. The site is a hub for all these people to share their original tunes and the name of the site itself has become a new name for this genre "micromusic."

The website originates from Switzerland created by three guys [who weren't called this by their mum's when they were born but have come to be known to thousands] *carl*, *wanga* and *super_b*—their onscreen "handles." Each was responsible for the direction of the site and *wanga*, Paco Manzanares, used his efforts to influence the art direction and over five years later continues to design the micromusic products created by the Swiss headquarter. "Micromusic.net is based on RGB colours plus yellow," says *wanga*, "with a minimal use of pictures in favour of lists and charts to display a lot of information in a simple structure; it is reminiscent of big Lego bricks. A very important influence too is of course the pixels from old school videogames and all the products I design, the t-shirts, microbuilder packaging, record and CD's flyers and now the new micro-k trainer all follow this pattern visually."

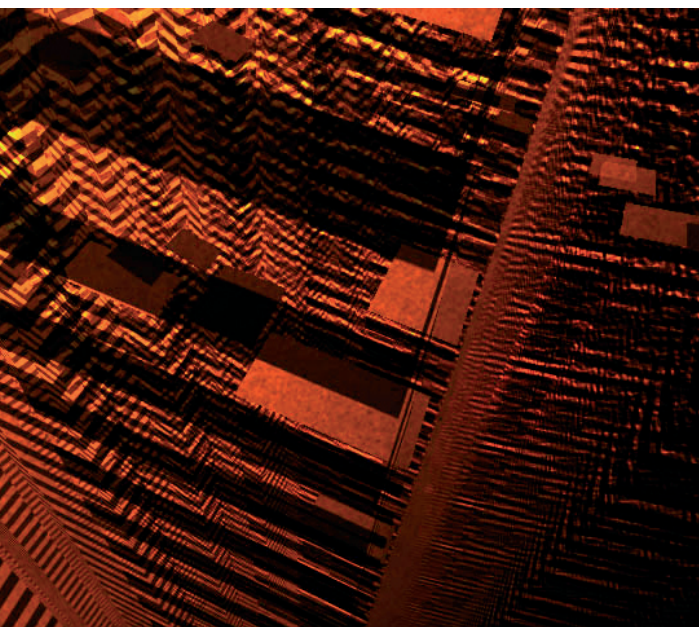
What? A music website for old school computer nerds and music freaks releasing trainers?! Handcrafted by Kuenzli Schuhe [who also manufacture K-Swiss] the micro-k will be available to order from the micromusic website any day now. *wanga* explains, "Isn't it a good idea for a screen addict to put on a sporty shoe and go out for some

activity?" And folks... a winter in front of my laptop not too far away from the cookie jar I think he is probably right! "It is also cool for a label to have products like the t-shirts and trainers available—and it is an outstanding product for people who want to support micromusic.net to allow us to realise future projects." And of these future products in the pipeline is a compilation CD "Music for Joggers" with hand printed cover.

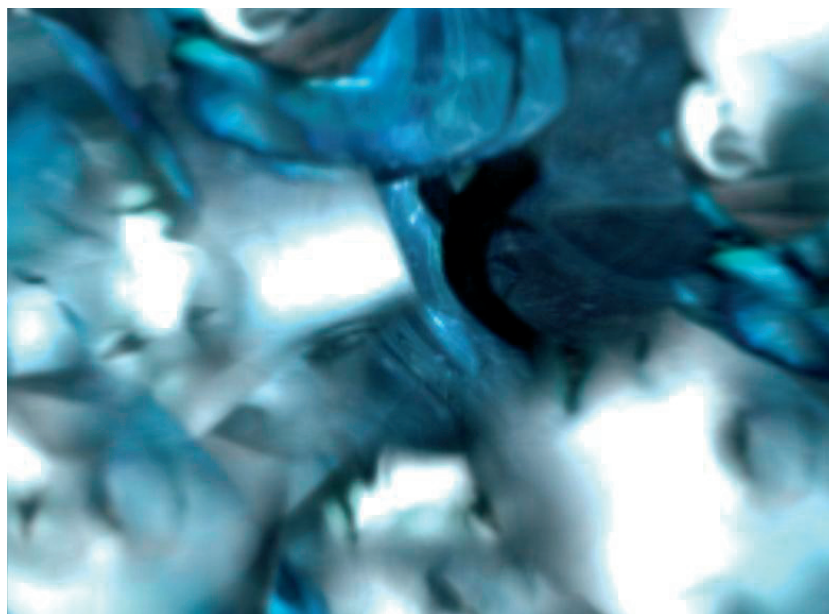
Being really hands on with all the micromusic projects is something really important for *wanga*—there are stories of him cutting boxes and stickers for all night like an elf to have things ready for the product launch and sleeping on whatever corner of his studio he can find. "Hands on is a very essential part of micromusic, we are bricoleurs par excellence! We [the whole micromusic community] love making music with bent circuits, we are fondly pixelating our icons and organising microevents with passion. I find it a deep quality, that individuals in the community are putting such big efforts to keep this scene. A CD or a shoe production should reflect it. A woodprint cover for "Music for Joggers" will need to have a lot of hand crafting to finish, carving, lead typesetting, adjusting and finally cleaning the print press. It's a nice satisfying work far from the computer. We leave our fingerprints on all of our products."

To check out *wanga*'s work visit www.micromusic.net where you will also find details to order the new micro-k shoe!

photo: Andy Pal, Basel



Diefenbach



Antti for Crankshaft, Kschzt and Neurokin, Barcelona

PAINTING WALLS WITH LIGHT

VJ-ING WITH »EFFEKT«

by Lasse Jul Nielsen <ln@sceen.org> and Stefan Mylleager <stefan@effekts.dk>

Let's face it: Live-VJing is the next big thing after DJing. And its protagonists are about to catch up in fame with their counterparts at the turntables. While DJs usually are bound to commercial equipment, VJs often come up with their own homebrewed software applications, tools and frameworks. Since 2001 Lasse Jul Nielsen and Michael Rasmussen have been working on their individual solution, the VJing system »Effekt«. While still putting final touches on version 2.0, they give an in-depth report on the development process, live problematics and issues of VJing in general.

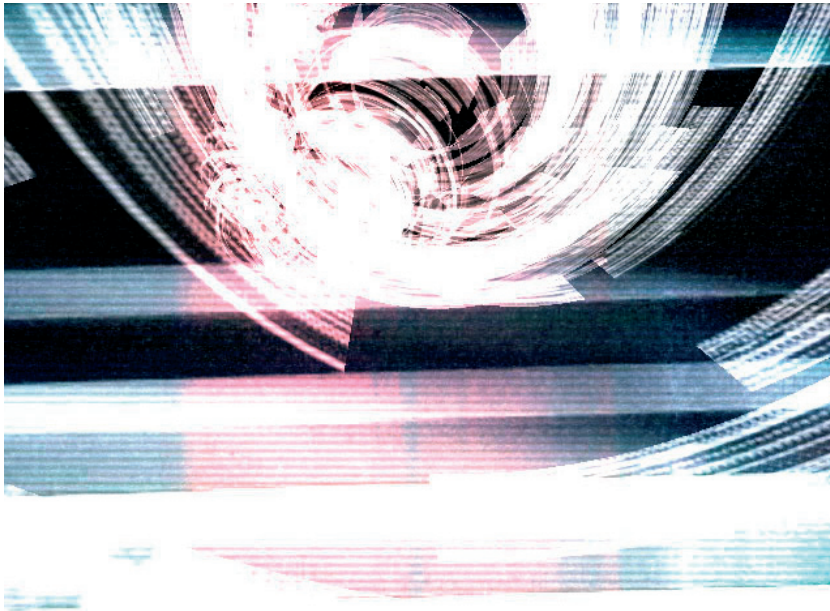
Starting Effekt

The development of the original Effekt software has its feeble origin in events that transpired at a Goldie concert that took place in Copenhagen in early 2001. Three members from the Danish part of the international computer subculture "demoscene" accidentally stumbled upon each other and gradually took to discussing the visual backdrop made for the event. As the evening unfolded, a general consensus was developed: While the visuals in general were pleasing, they distinguished themselves mostly by being technically simplistic to a degree that just barely managed to stop short of seeming anachronistic. Having concentrated mostly on digital rendering and simulation, the team was surprised to find out that most of the visuals being made at the time were based on the same analogue methods that pioneered the sixties and consolidated in the seventies. In a decade where electronic music was rapidly maturing and was daring to be more experimental than ever before, it was strange to observe a void where one intuitively would have expected an abundance of projected digital effects to harmonize with the music being played. In what could perhaps diplomatically be called "lovable naivety" (or more honestly ignorance), the developers decided to start the development of what would later evolve into the Effekt framework.

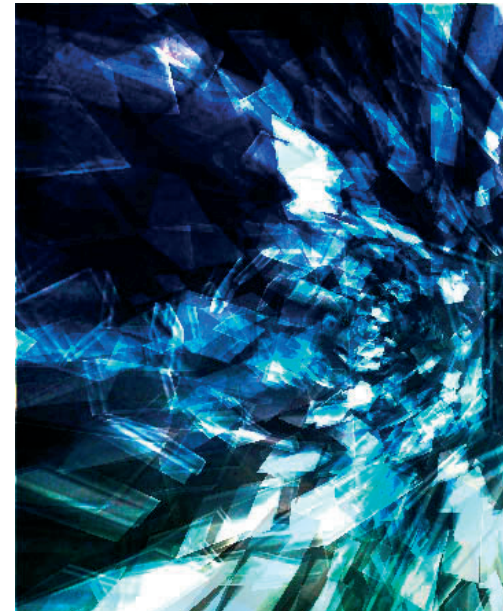
Methology and Mechanisms

Since overall limitlessness was one of the main goals of the piece of software the team was now beginning to envision, it was clear from the beginning that the design philosophies of traditional real-time productions had to be abandoned: Sequences of pre-packages effects would do little to cater for the desire for potential endless expansion. At this point, making a plug-in host to do combined sound analysis (implemented via plug-ins, but backed by a centralised serving mechanism in the host for ease of maintenance and performance) and visual response (implemented as any number of plug-ins for 3d-rendering, video decoding, value and expression processing etc.) seemed like the most natural choice. The next problem to be tackled as part of the design process arose as a direct consequence of this choice: Which structure to use for making coherent and functional clusters of these plug-in "instances"?

Since an incredible amount of software for composition and live-playback and -mixing had already been developed, it seemed rational that the programmers could derive experience on how to deal with the specific problems of live-modulation. There's no doubt that many audio applications inspired the team for the functionality of Effekt. In particular Buzz, Max-MSP and Logic should



No artist



Pernillerin

be mentioned in this context. Especially the simplistic graph layout of Buzz seemed interesting for this intention. Upon further reflection the graph layout became increasingly attractive, and the vague outlines of something that seemed feasible became increasingly clear:

If the team was to think of each component as a self-contained unit having an arbitrary number of input and output slots, each of a type from a pre-defined set, and treat them as nodes in a graph, it would end up with a curious number of positive side effects. Were they to decide to have consistent input slots on the left-hand side of each component and the right-hand side reserved for output slots, they could define each active instance of a component having only output slots as a root node in the current graph, components having both in and output slots to be modulators and finally components having only input slots as renderers. This would conveniently encourage to layout each graph in a left to right manner, thus avoiding to have to worry needlessly about automatic layout features.

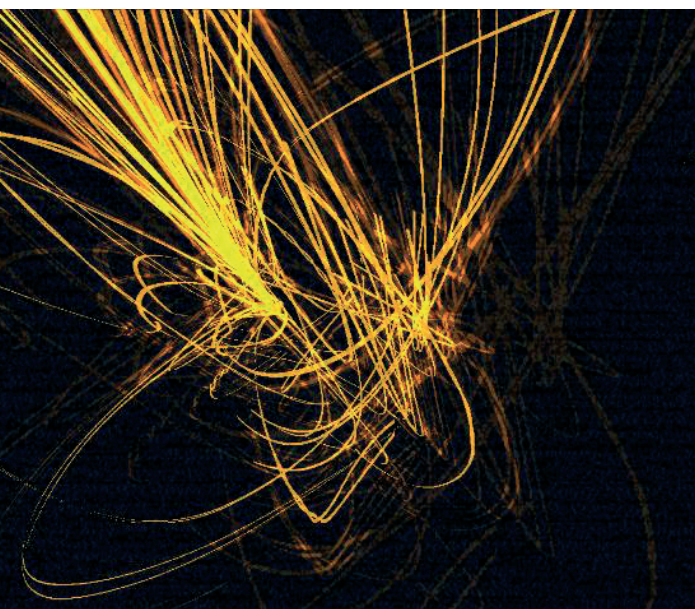
Besides the notion of treating a sequence as a graph-based cluster of plug-in instances, Effekt does not in truth separate itself noticeably from many other VJ'ing applications. It distinguishes itself primarily by being extremely generic (Effekt currently has only 52 unique plug-in types) and by its networked architecture: The Sequencer (the controlling application) and the Rendering Client are separate programs, communicating exclusively via a network connection. Theoretically the sequencer is capable of controlling multiple concurrent clients, but this notion was discarded early in the development phase as it turned out not to be very practical or indeed not useful in a live situation. That being said, the fundamental paradigm has so far held up quite well, and in the experience of the developers, a surprisingly large number of very distinct effects can be achieved by using the current set of plug-ins.

Live problematics

Another important goal during development, apart from modularity, was the ability to actually get something “on the screen” as early as possible. Knowing from experience that a development period of a year or more can kill even the most enthusiastic non-commercial project, the team made a rough estimate of minimum development time and started arranging their first gig - effectively creating a deadline six months later. This of course turned out to be insufficient time, and “survived” would probably be the best way to describe the most positive aspect of their first performance. Not unlike making a demo, the premiere included minimum sleep the days before deadline, hardware problems during the show and of course crashes. Nevertheless, they were now in business and started playing regularly while bug fixing on the side.

One of the major flaws of most VJing they had seen by then, was the apparent detachment from the music it was supposed to be supplementing. The working dogma when producing material was and still is that it has to fit the music. This is achieved mechanically by attaching some arbitrary sound analysis parameter to the “video” (i.e. the stuff on the screen, which is more often than not real-time graphics rather than actual recorded video) to an element in the music by real-time FFT or midi analysis.

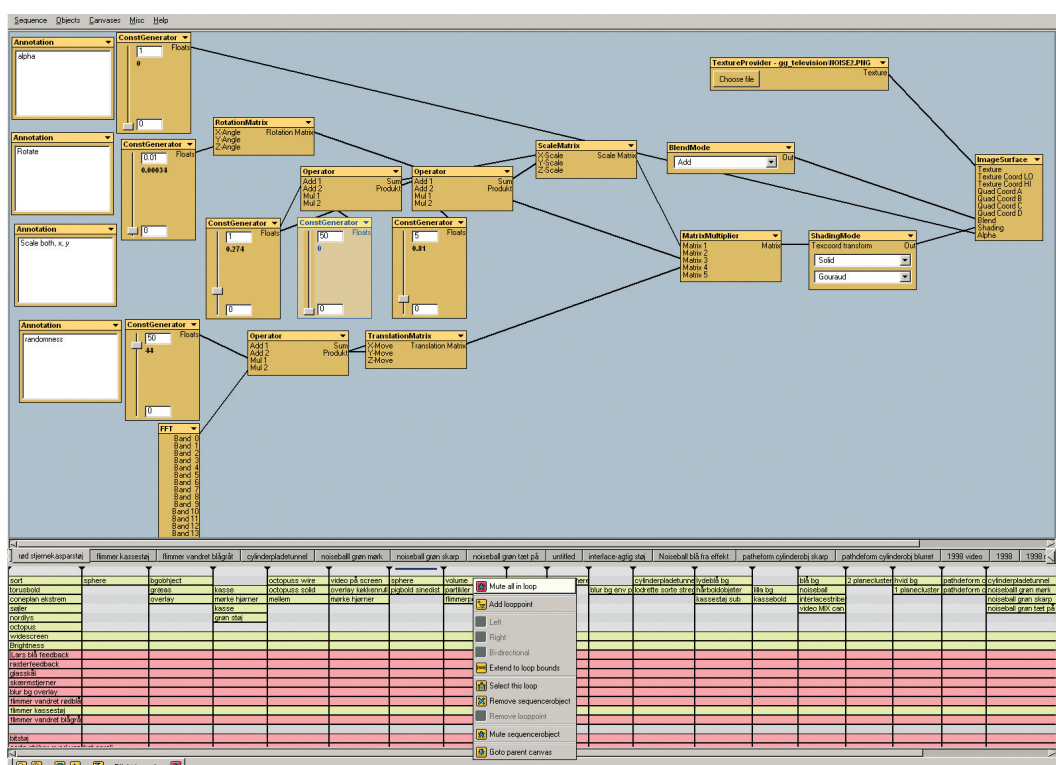
The programmers also have a firm belief that some shapes, colors and impressions fit different types of music better than others. Every time the team is asked to play a job for a new client, the first part of the process is to obtain either a general sample of their work, or preferably the actual set scheduled to be played at the evening in question. Typically, a new set of segregated resources (be it textures, meshes or videos) are created specifically with the style of the clients output in mind. While the programmers do reuse resources between artists if deemed appropriate, keeping thematic helps to ensure aesthetical



Sandkassen #1



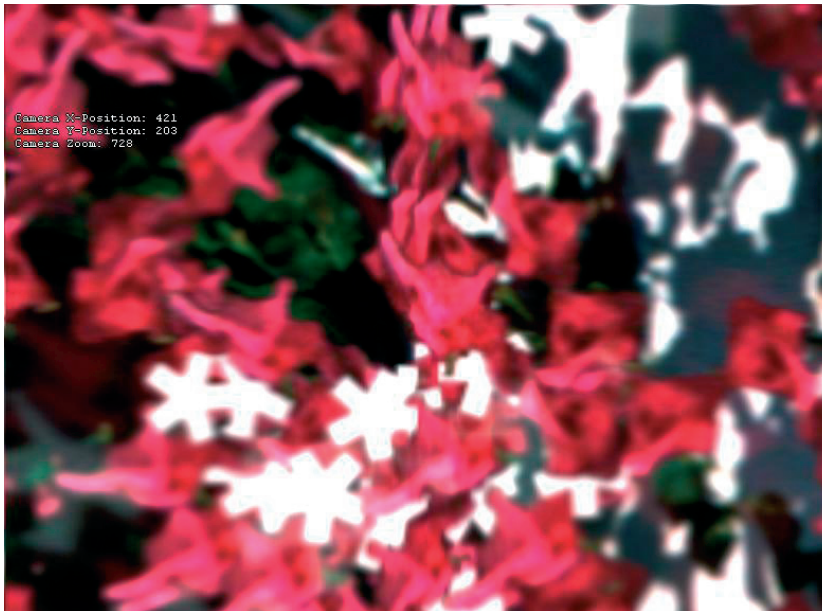
Sandkassen #2



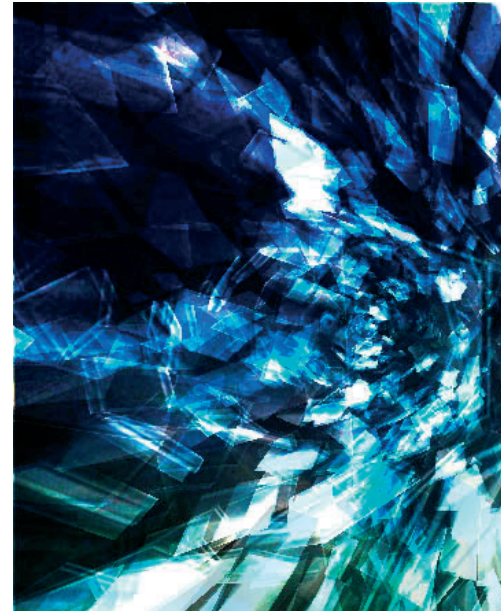
About Effekt: Effekt is a tool for delivering synchronized real-time rendered visuals for music, operated by one or more persons (see interface above). Effekt enables you to design and mix the visuals live, much in the same way as musicians play. That is, start with a rough idea about what to do when, but improvise during the set, and make the visuals fit the direction of the music. This is achieved by a very open-ended software based on a lightweight framework with a plug-in architecture. The interface resembles the likes of buzz, reaktor and maxMSP, where different plug-ins are placed on a canvas and connected by threads of data. This very open structure makes room for experimenting and improvising, often achieving unpredicted results.

coherency and forces them to come up with something visually unique for each band. This in turn makes the act readily associable with the band and ensures that people will be able to recognize their style and presence. Naturally some recycling is involved, but changing, say

color and tempo, can make an important impact on the relationship between the graphics and the music and how they work together. The team also works with a lot of pre-inserted variables that allows them to change the graphics to follow the flow of the music when they are



Antti for Crankshaft, Kschzt and Neurokin, Barcelona



Pernillerin

performing live. This makes the VJing experience every bit as live as the music in a laptop concert and gives a much more organic and interactive feeling compared to standard pre-recorded backdrop video.

This is not to say that their approach is without cons: First of all it involves a lot of work in preparing for each show. They have been lucky enough to play regularly (and even tour) with a few local artists, allowing them to recycle their individual sets with minor changes for each show. Creating a new set from scratch usually takes about 3-4 weeks minimum, so it would be an impossible workload to make something completely unique for every artist each time they play. But thanks to the modular architecture of Effekt, they can change a few constants, swap some textures, cycle the colors, and usually this does it after work of a week.

Another problem with their approach is making people understand and appreciate the amount of work involved. Here, they are not referring to the audience (they are usually very appreciative) but rather the club owners and concert promoters, who either won't pay a decent salary for the work or expect to get visuals for the whole night's line-up. The team knows first-hand that staying concentrated for a 6-hour, 5-artist show is next to impossible. And no, we do not have "just something we can press play and leave on for the last two hours", thank you.

Yet all in all, it's very rewarding, they say, to be out there "experiencing the feeling that your work has paid off, everyone is having a good time, and the big screen isn't flickering meaningless nonsense, but actually making some sort of relation to the music."

One-shot development, and why it's not necessarily a bad thing

In addition to the team's primary software suite, we have at times either been forced or desired to work outside the confines of the Effekt framework. At times this has been

done to experiment with effects that could not be comfortably achieved in the Effekt architecture, as was done for a recent event at "Sandkassen" in Copenhagen. The producers had been playing with the notion of using various emergent behavioral systems for sound visualization and decided to test it out before doing the full monty.

At the same time it allowed them to attempt to refine their setup for receiving midi-input, and the whole application was controlled exclusively by an Oxygen-8 midi controller. Any changes found to be superior were then subsequently reverse integrated into the Effekt codebase. Most of these one-shot applications are built on top of a fairly simple external framework. This has allowed them to do rapid prototyping of more obscure input methods, such as Wacom pens and PlayStation2 controllers. A while back they were asked to do a quick, but preferably generic one-shot application for a party in Barcelona tailored for use by the Finnish artist Antti Jädertpolm (www.tpalm.org). Since he already used a Wacom pen, the team thought it might be amusing to try and adapt this method of control, while simultaneously trying to adapt to his visual style, relying heavily on image replication, scaling and rotation.

Doing these small quick one-shot VJing applications is wonderful. It helps staying motivated and continuously discovering improvements that can be made to the main software.

Version 2 of Effekt is supposed to be out soon. Keep checking the Effekt website for further info, screenshots, videos, additional software and gigs.

Links:

www.effekts.dk

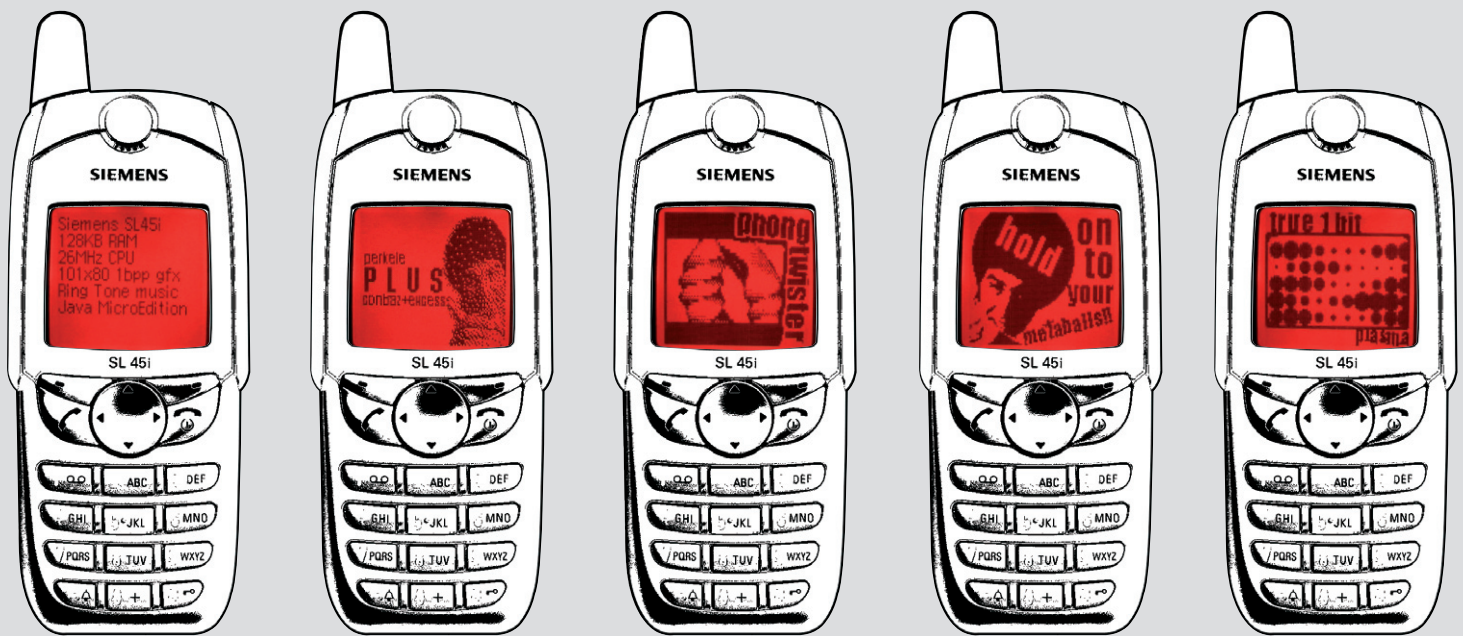


MOBILE MAYHEM

DEMO PLATFORMS OF THE 21ST CENTURY: CELL PHONES

With the rapid growth of technology in the recent years, cell phones have shrunk from fat bricks with huge antennas into tiny monsters with high-resolution screen displays no bigger than a baby's fist. In just a few years increasingly faster processors and higher screen resolutions have turned these personal communication devices into full-blooded, hand-held gaming platforms, whose market starts to rival the conventional hand-held consoles.

by Filipe ps Cruz <fc@sceen.org>



Perkele Plus by Contraz & Excess (Assembly 2002)

Performing on a Java MicroEdition based Siemens SL45i *Perkele Plus* ranked number 2 of 13 in the mobile demo competition at Assembly 2002, Finland's biggest demo and gaming event. Norwegian demogroups Contraz and Excess, having their roots in the Amiga demoscene, focused on famous retro effects. Simulated classics like 3D tunnels, phong twisters or glenz balls show the potential of the utterly obsolete SL45i. The funky ringtone melody reminds of the legendary chiptunes done by idols of the earliest computer kids generation. No wonder why Rob Hubbard gets some respects in *Perkele Plus* as well. A demo for a minimalistic system, yet full of inspiring effects.

Just like in any game platform ever invented, demos started spawning in this platform to challenge the limits of the machine. The ones first worth a mention were developed in early days of the new millennium for monochrome low resolution displays of series 30 and series 40 models. These phones were a nightmare to develop in: hard to find SDKs, virtually no examples, poorly written documentation, non-existent development support from the hardware makers. The industry was still pretty much in its genesis and hardware makers were more interested in developing better, faster, smaller, cuter looking phones, not in facilitating development for the existing ones.

A few worth-to-check examples of demos for these models can be found among the releases of the famous Finnish demoparty Assembly. In 2002, the mobile device demo competition—a newly-created demo competition category—was conceived, having in mind handheld devices of all kind, including Gameboys (Color/Advance), PocketPCs, PDAs and mobile phones. Although this competition wasn't the first ever to spur out demos coming from the demo scene for mobile phones, it was one, if not *the* competition that directed the scene's interest towards the platform. Both the prize money and special sponsorship deals with Nokia pushed the Assembly handheld devices competition into special highlight through the years. Demos for mobile phones released on 2002 at this compo include *Perkele Plus* by Norwegian demo groups Contraz and Excess for the Siemens sl45i; *925* by Kooma for the Nokia 3410; and *Aikasektri* by Extend and Embassy for the Nokia 7650.

It didn't take very long until the standard rose from 128x128 black and white pixel displays with monophonic tones into 320x240 65536 colors pixels with polyphonic

ON THE PHONE WITH KUSMA

Filipe had a small chat with Erik "kusma" Faye-Lund, one of the coders of the second placed demo at Assembly 2002 handheld devices competition called *Perkele Plus*. It was made for the Siemens SL45i and it's a co-operative effort by two Norwegian demogroups that go by the name of Contraz and Excess.

How different is it to code for these platforms, Erik? How much did the platform constraints of the sl45i influence your creative process?

Well, mobile phones are kind of funny platforms. The ones I've coded for are really restrictive and challenging. You have to think out new ways of doing everything, kinda like C64... Everything is cheats. In *perkele plus*, all we used was sprites and tiled backgrounds. The twister, for example, is something like 64 frames of pre-rotated scanlines used as sprites.

How well documented are the devkits for cellphones? Does it show that it's still a new platform in the market, with lack of documentation and support from the hardware makers?

Well, we discovered a *lot* of errors in the documentation for the Siemens sl45i SDK. A lot of stuff was defined to behave stricter than we wanted, but luckily it wasn't always the case. I have been told that on newer firmware, some of the *perkele plus* effects don't work though. I guess they have patched some of the bugs/tricks or whatever.

Does the demo run at all on other models? Which ones?

Yes, it runs on some other Siemens phones but not correctly ;) . Don't really know the name of the models, never had any of those phones. All I have is the SDK, the emulator, and Concrete/Contraz (the other coder of *perkele plus*) is helpful when it comes to testing ;)

sound. The markets started the fusion between cell phones, PDA and hand-held consoles industries. High-resolution color displays and polyphonic tones were becoming the norm, first in Japan, then Scandinavia and quickly spread throughout Europe and the US.

In early 2003, a digital art exhibit organized by media art collective Katastro.fi at Kiasma — the Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki — provided an opportunity for the group to develop for the relatively new Nokia Series60 models. A demo called *Crime Minister of Europe* came out of it; it was the next best thing to sliced bread! Buggy as hell but who gives a damn? It worked and it rocked! At this point, game companies were still adapting to the new market and still somewhat reluctant to dive head first into shaky grounds. Standards were still being revised and each semester new models would come out with more marketable features: eye-catchers for the consumers, horrible nightmares for the developers trying to secure inter-model operability.

A year later in Summer 2003, at a new edition of the demoparty Assembly, the same competition saw the release of four new mobile phone demos. Two for the Sony Ericson p800: *Septima* by Yodel and *Zion* by Detour. And two other for Nokia Series60 models: *Love is a Fix* by CNCD, *Komplex* and *Orange* and *Eff8* by Portal Project

By the end of 2003, the industry seemed to have consolidated mobile phones to be a viable video games market. Special models like the N-gage were issued with a supposedly more gamer-friendly ergonomic / aesthetical value. Having to turn off your phone to change the game

or replace the cursor stick with a mini joystick wasn't quite well accepted, but the marketing campaign and the low prices made it sell, and people started buying those new hip game-cards.

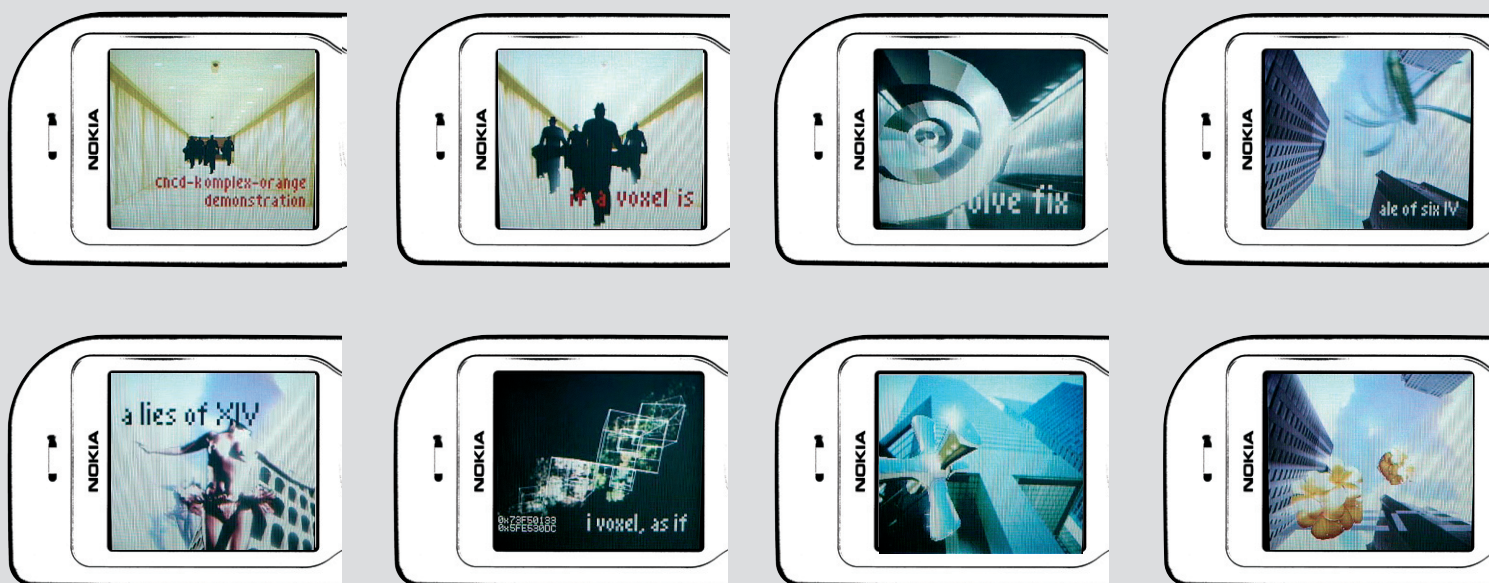
Game companies focused on mobile phones started to flourish, suddenly we were witnessing a 1996 pc scene revival, 200hz machines with software rendered 3d engines, crude sound effects, cute pixel graphics and immersive gameplay. Good game ideas and licenses from movie trends were the ticket for market success. And the industry grew tall and prosperous! The rich new media bastards proliferated and it was good!

Phones kept evolving, Scandinavia kept trying to keep up with the Japanese innovations, high-quality built-in cameras, even higher-quality screen displays. Smartphones replacing PDAs. Having reached ridiculously small sizes to the point where the user could barely press _just one_ button at a time, the focus of development shifted into appealing design, personalized "character", better keyboard interaction functionality and of course higher capacity, both of resident memory and processor speed. GPRS, Blue tooth and infrared communications became requirements on any new model. Standards for cross-model compatibility were fully adopted, and nowadays when a program is created for a Series60 phone, you can expect it to operate pretty much the same way - with some small performance differences - on a whole range of phones of different brands.

2004 once again brought us a few new demos for mobile phones, most of them coded for Series60. Matt Current, a

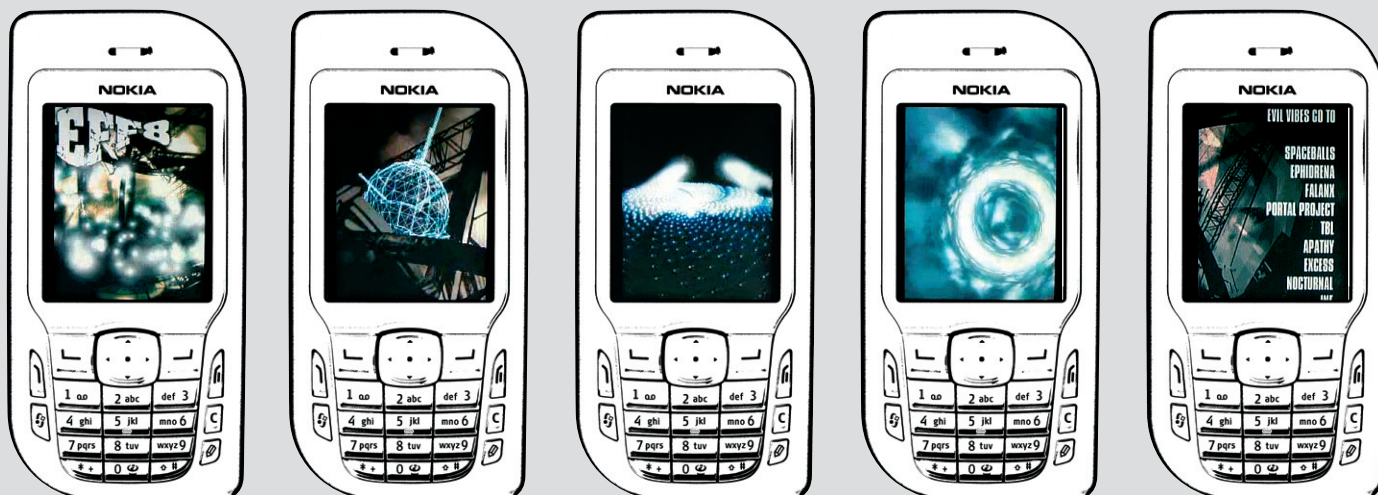
Series60

is not a cellphone but a smartphone software platform, built on the Symbian OS. It is licensed by some of the foremost mobile phone manufacturers including LG Electronics, Lenovo, Nokia, Panasonic, Samsung, Sendo, and Siemens.



Love is a fix by CNCD, Complex & Orange (Assembly 2003)

Engineered for the Series 60, 'Love is a Fix' scored 4th place out of 9 in Assembly03 mobile demo competition. Made by the katastro.fi art group, it's filled with fresh 2d background art and a hand full of typical nineties scene effects.



Eff8 by Portal Project (Assembly 2003)

A short demo which scored a lousy 8th place out of 9 at Assembly03 mobile demo competition. Undeserving, since the very in your face attitude, the music and the disturbingly fast tunnel effect make some true highlights, while minimalistic use of 2D graphics layers in 2D/3D collage sequences remain simply pleasing.

ON THE PHONE WITH ANNIE & TAPE

We also asked Janne “Annie” Toivanen, coder for Matt Current and Tapio “Tape” Viitanen of the demogroup Extend, both employed in the mobile phone games industry, a few questions regarding modern development for the series60 models.

How much do platform constraints influence your creative work nowadays?

Annie: For us, making demos for phones has been quite easy. I don’t have any need to write Symbian-specific code, thanks to the Rocket Science’s Symbian-base. It gives applications a screen to write pixels to and a good music-player. That’s a similar situation as in PC-world, where demos usually use third-party sound and graphics libraries to aid the development process.

We have all the effects running on a Windows-based editor. It allows artists to load mandatory data, drop effects on timeline and tweek the effect parameters. It features a real-time preview, so it’s possible to see changes immediately. When it’s time to check the result running on the actual phone, it’s a single-click job and editor makes a Symbian installation file automatically.

The editor is a product of Rocket Science and used for several commercial-things also, such as mobile music video ‘One MC, One Delay’, but when it was in development, I only had demos in my mind.

How easy is it to develop for mobile phones? are they well documented? how is the support from the hardware makers behalf? i have heard it’s been quite bad, is it getting any better as more attention gets raised to the platform?

Tape: Symbian programming is a little bit different from other environments and you just have to get familiar with it. Symbian SDK itself is free of charge but SDK’s which make the windows emulation testing possible are commercial. For Symbian, there’s tons of documents. Sym-

bian itself documents stuff and the phone makers also document much and keep forums. There’s also some other very good pages on the web like www.newlc.com. For the symbian programming beginner there’s no doubt too much documentation, you really don’t know where to start. A natural way to start is to download some example software and toy around with it. The phone makers don’t naturally have a lot of time to help out every small developer in their problems and premium support costs more than any democoder can afford.

To what lengths do you have to go to ensure a certain demo works properly on all different models? how easy is it to ensure cross-model compliance on series 60? is it trial and error, do you end up doing model specific patches?

Tape: As we’re speaking of demos which are probably shown on your own phone, you really don’t have to ensure but the one phone to work :-). But as we’re using tested base on which the demos run, they should run on >95% of Series60 phones. Of course as new phones arrive, there’s always the possibility that old productions don’t work with it. Series60 phones are very much incompatible by the means of demo programming which needs fast screen access and sound. There’s no “directx” which would unify things enough and there’s no information base anywhere about the these differences, so yes, it’s trial and error. Every phone must be tested and model specific patches are applied.

Do you think the number of demos in mobile phones is representative of the size of the game industry in such platforms? Is there a direct co-relation in your opinion?

Tape: Maybe there’s direct relation about how many democoders have entered the mobile software business? :-)

demo group also active in GameBoy and PC scene, opened the year with the release of their Ultimate Meeting 2003 console competition winner demo: Communism, Revolution and a Free Poland. At Breakpoint 2004 they won the same competition with yet another awesome mobile phone demo: Pioneers of Modern Economics + Hitek Sounds for Low Level Music. A few party and meeting invitations were also released before the return of the milestone event, the Assembly 2004 mobile device demo competition. That year only 3 entries were delivered: *Kalmo* by Rokkstar, Symbian Series60, *ffi* by ka and alien/vd, Java Series40 and *CordClipper* by cord-less, Symbian Series60.

2004 still brought a few other interesting releases, I would mainly like to focus on the release of a port made by the Hungarian amuQ Creations for Series60 of the legendary PC intro Stikman's World by Coma.

YOLK ON MOBILE DEMOS

Mikko "Yolk" Karvonen, musician of the legendary CNCD demogroup and member of *katastro.fi* media art collective on the work process for these machines compared to his normal way of making music:

"Basically it wasn't THAT different; both soundtracks (from 'Love is a Fix' and 'Crime Minister of Europe') were done using Logic Audio Platinum 5.5.1 on the PC.

But, I had to use a program called *Beatnik Editor* as a software synth. Beatnik (Player) is actually the same thing that's builtin in all Nokia Series60 phones, so it also contains the same sample-kit as the mobile phone. As far as I know it's the only possibility for "professional" music composing for a Series60 phone. So you can compose on Logic using GeneralMIDI, use the Beatnik Editor as a software synth and when the track is finished, you just export it as a .mid file, load it up in Beatnik Editor and save it in Beatnik's proprietary RMF format.

So far everything seems quite straightforward and handy. But it isn't. For starters, Beatnik is supposed to work with Logic, and it does, but you first have to install a third-party MIDI driver called MIDI Yoke (the same requirement is valid for other sequencers as well).

It acts as an interface between Logic and Beatnik Editor (thus, it's like a virtual MIDI cable that functions inside of your computer). To get MIDI Yoke installed without crashing, Logic actually requires you to edit your 'win.ini' file. This took me some time to figure out... When I eventually got my system working, I had to face the next big problem: Beatnik is quite badly programmed and it has an enormous latency! Even though I ran it thru my professional RME audio card. I also tried using a normal soundcard but I reckon it was even worse. It was completely impossible to play and record anything using my MIDI keyboard, 'coz the latency time was about half a second or so...

So, I ended up composing with a mouse and my computer's keyboard. That's something I haven't really done after the tracker days, and I kinda gave up trackers back in 1998 [nowadays I'm using Renoise (which I bought) occasionally for some stuff]. It was quite hard and pain-

ful. :) Entering notes in the Matrix Editor with a mouse, adjusting the notes' durations and volumes by hand... the stuff you get "for free" when playing in the notes on a MIDI keyboard. ;)

Links:

Demoscene archive — www.scene.org

Demoscene release database — www.pouet.net

Beatnik Editor — www.beatnik.com/products/editor.html

MIDI Yoke — www.midiox.com/myoke.htm

Symbian Ressource — www.allaboutsymbian.com/

We were producing the first demo ('Crime Minister of Europe') for Kiasma, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, where we had the demoscene.katastro.fi exhibition at which this mobile demo was to be premiered. Kiasma provided us with 2-3 Nokia 7650 phones (the first Series60 model which had the camera and all). Of course Jugi, Galvados & Juliet needed them more than I did, so I didn't have a real phone to listen to my music from, I just had to relax and rely on Beatnik Editor's output. Which was using the same sample bank as the actual phone. A couple of nights before we were finished with the demo, I got one of the 7650's for testing... Everything sounded TERRIBLE from it. The quality of the speaker is beyond comprehension! I couldn't really hear anything under the trebly and noisy hihat sounds. I tried lowering their volume about 5 times until it started to sound a bit better. I had to make a lot of these kind of small mixing adjustments to get it "right" on the phone. Don't know if it is...

The story with the follow-up demo 'Love is a Fix' is quite the same, except that now I had some prior experience with Beatnik Editor and the work process (= do-everything-with-a-mouse). So I got started much faster this time. I personally like the 'Love is a Fix' soundtrack better, as it sounds less "forced" and more mellow than the Crime Minister one. We had a tough deadline with 'Love is a Fix' as well, but this time I wasn't as worried about how the music would turn out 'cause I had already done it once before.

I have a Nokia 6600 nowadays and both demos work on it (although you have to install 'Crime Minister' on the phone's internal memory and not on the memory card to get it to work). Unfortunately Nokia didn't improve the speaker with this model yet, so both tracks continue sounding quite bad IMHO. Haven't tested it on the later S60 models; hopefully they've done something with the speaker! If not, I'm ashamed of being Finnish!"



Gallery nineteen eighty eight.

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8-Bit: One

by Trent Watanabe
(from various, NES)
plastic coolness

i am 8-bit

Whether you were a hardcore Mario Bros. junkie, just couldn't stop spinning that track ball on Centipede, or had your thumbs permanently glued to a Nintendo controller during your formidable years, videogames probably affected your life—be it at four or 40.

i am 8-bit (www.iam8bit.net) pays homage to that era of button-mashing when 3D was a fantasy on par with flying cars—when gaming was about style, expression, and, most of all, unyielding fun. *i am 8-bit* gathers the talents of over 100 of the world's top artists to put their memories to paper, canvas, wood, or somewhere in-between, recalling those oh so fond gaming moments from the era when pixels reigned king. There are absolutely no 3D-inspired works in the show; just pre-1995 influences, a decadent time when

games were flat and flourishing with creativity. Anything goes (characters, logos, boss levels, consoles, etc.)—from the manic, crazed image of a Burger Time sausage gone ballistic to Space Invaders doing disco—hindered only by the artist's imagination.

i am 8-bit is a shared exhibit between LA's hottest new gallery, Gallery Nineteen Eighty Eight (www.nineteeneightyeight.com), which will be celebrating its one-year anniversary in April, and Acme Game Store (www.acmegamestore.com).

In cooperation with the curators SCEEN presents an exclusive selection of *i am 8-bit* art, featuring comments of the individual artist. For more information and art visit www.iam8bit.net



The Game Chose Me

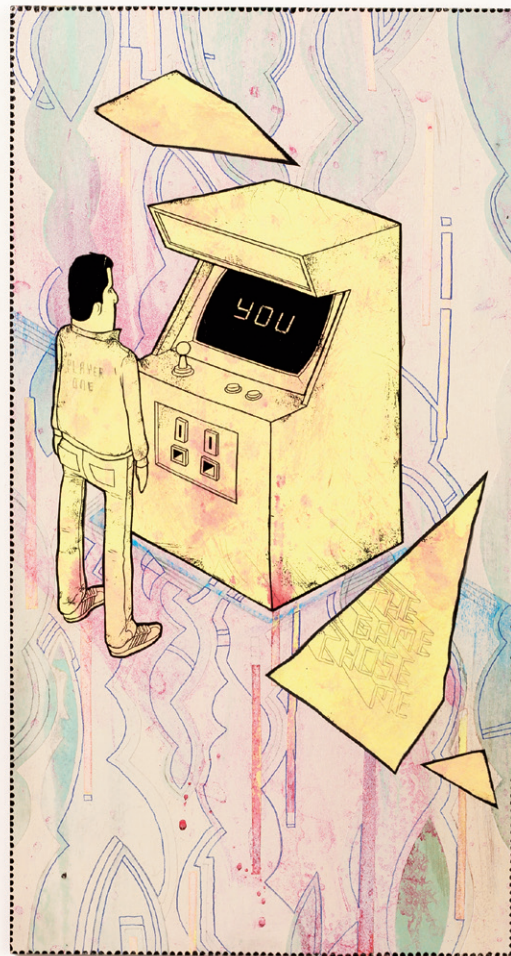
by Matt Clark

(from various)

spray paint, acrylic,
water color, ink, and collage

on wood, 7x14

www.robotherobot.com



"My piece is about finding your calling—feeling a sense of purpose. All people have something that they're naturally good at and that talent has been with you since you were born. You didn't choose it. There are millions of things in the world that need to get done, and each one of those things 'chooses' a person to do it. I thought it would be funny to explore this perspective through something seemingly trivial, like an arcade game. The game has selected the man to be its

ambassador. This kind of thing is universal, though—everyone is the ambassador of something, you just have to discover what it is." — **Matt Clark**



Super Mushroom Boogie

by Thomas Han

(from Super Mario Bros., NES)

mixed media on wood, 9x12

www.tomorama.com

"Super Mario Bros. was the first game I remember being completely drawn to. The fact that there were all these worlds that existed in every level, secret mazes and tunnels that led you to treasures, or alternate dimensions just bugged me out as a kid. It seemed as if, even turned off, the game was living and evolving by itself. I always said that Super Mario Bros. had one of the most influential, contemporary characters out there. It was such a great mix of cute and creepy that possessed those obscure monsters and landscapes. There was no denying those simplistic, exaggerated shapes and bright colors. It curved my way of looking at the world forever. Creating the piece for "i am 8-bit" was like a dream come true! Ever since I was an adolescent, it was sort of a dream to be able to do my own twist on Super Mario Bros. The freedom to create a story between me and the Super Mario world without any limitations is a blessing.

My piece is intended to bring out the essence of Super Mario Bros. The illusive feelings of childhood, the power of imagination and living in an 8-bit world! Plus, I just find the piece hilarious! Hopefully others will also, but mainly I just want people to think and have fun -- just like playing a video game!

Another thing I must add is that this piece is dedicated to Shigeru Miyamoto. If it wasn't for him, I don't think gaming and art would be as cool as it is today."

— Thomas Han

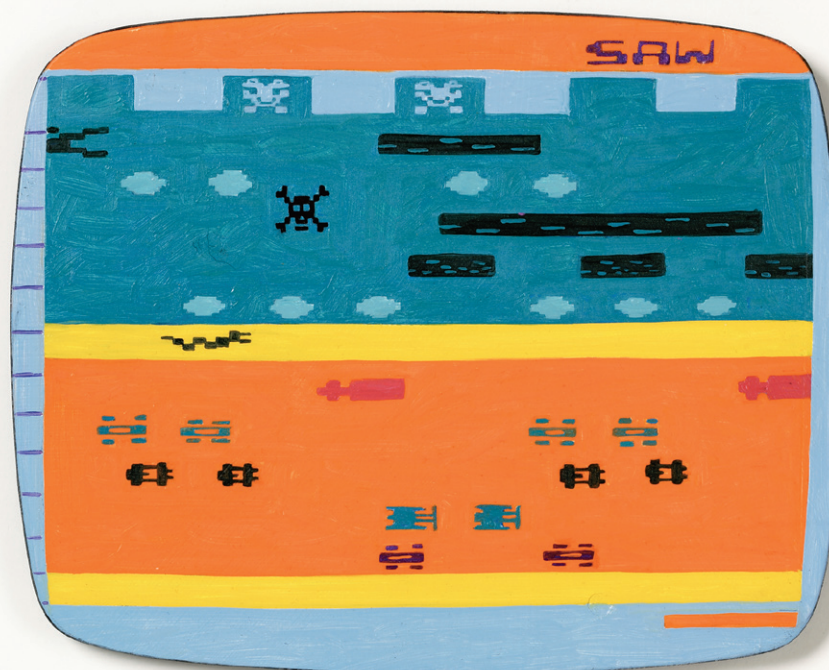
Game Over 1

by Scott Saw

(from Frogger, arcade)

acrylic on board, 14.5x11.5

www.scottsaw.com



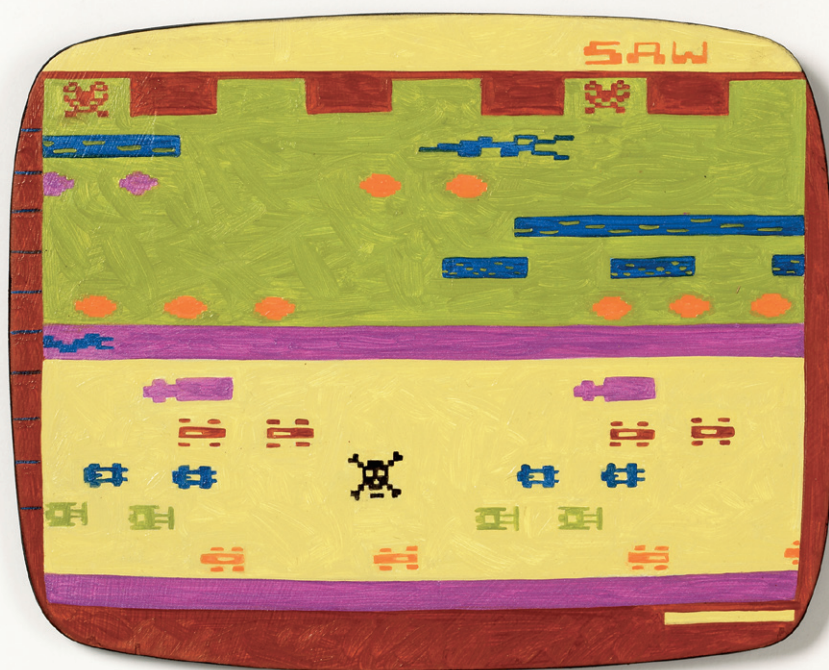
Game Over 2

by Scott Saw

(from Frogger, arcade)

acrylic on board, 14.5x11.5

www.scottsaw.com



"I would rather play Frogger on my Atari 2600 over any new-school videogame! Call me old-school—I don't care. I find the simplicity of the graphics and gameplay charming in 80's videogames. I have an Atari 2600 hooked up to a vintage TV in my studio and I usually kick off a studio session by playing Frogger. It's a great way to disorient myself and bring my head back to a childlike, playful state.

When the game is over, the screen changes to a new random color theme every few seconds. I just let it cycle through these awesome color sets as I paint ... sometimes, I get inspired by the unique color combos and bring them into the piece that I'm working on. These three paintings are a tribute to the goodness Frogger has brought to me and my art." — Scott Saw



Mario Block

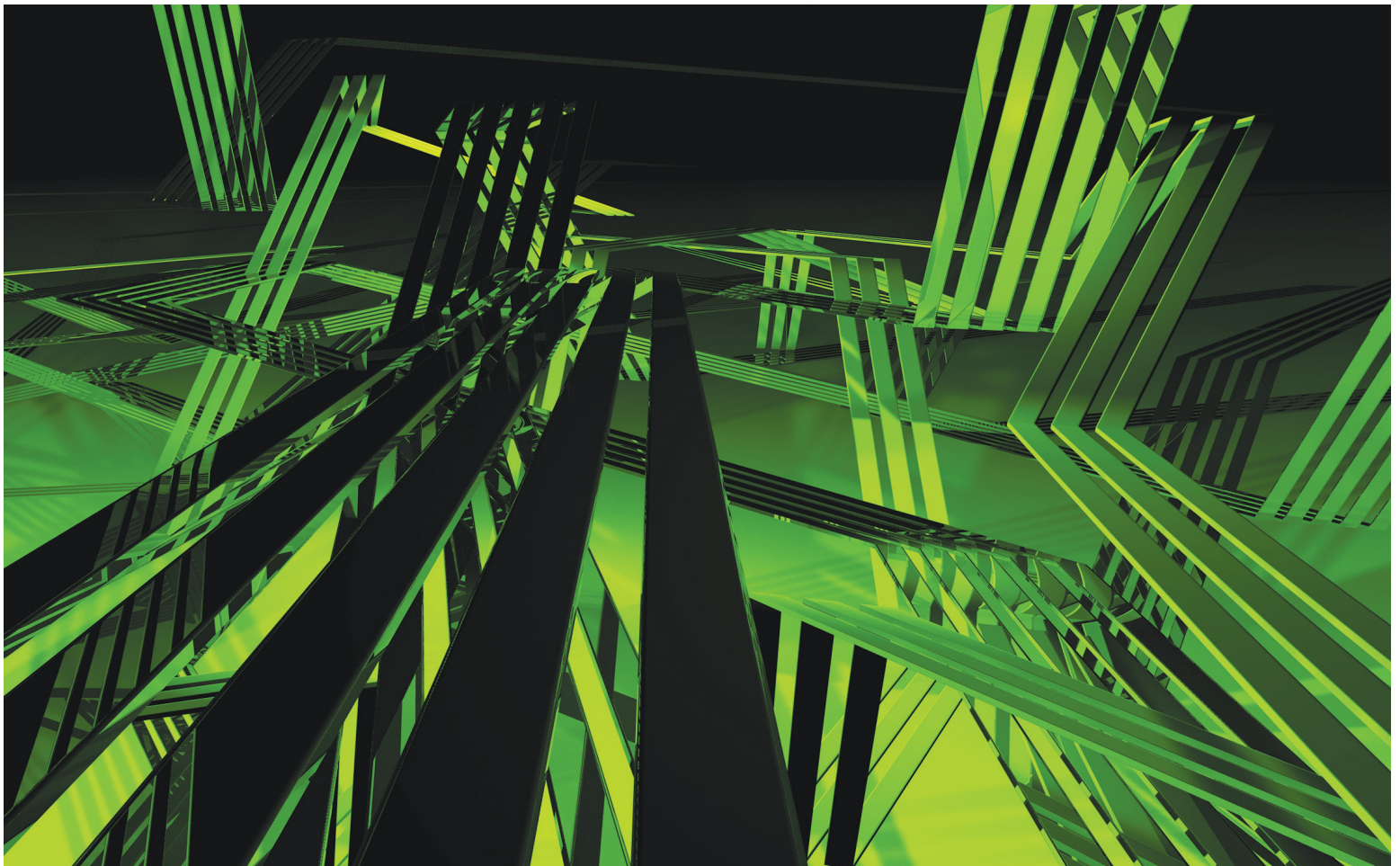
by Gabe Swarr

(from Super Mario Bros. 3, NES)

acrylic on illustration board, 5x7

www.bigpantsmouse.com

"I first played Super Mario Bros. when I got the NES for Christmas in 1986. My brain could barely comprehend that it was my fingers forcing the little red and brown plumber to run and get hurt. Then it was my brother's turn to hurt the little green and white man. We loved it! Over and over again we forced the tiny Italian men to do our bidding. I've always loved having a slave to stomp on those pesky mushrooms, throw fireballs or just stomp on peoples' heads to make them disappear. Mario is my hero." — Gabe Swarr



CHIGHLANDSCHAFTEN

8-BIT MEETS 16-BIT

Sometimes looking backwards takes you forwards. At least that's how it seemed to have worked for composer and musician JONSON when he created an entire album around his sound experiments using a senior Commodore Amiga 1200. Chiplandschaften, released at Mikrolux earlier this year, re-introduces an obsolete hardware's glitchy 8-bit sound aesthetics—together with a beautiful, melodious 16-bit ambient wrap. A combination we wanted to know more about.

by Alexander Scholz <as@sceen.org>

The 8-bit influence is essential to the concept of Chiplandschaften and implies a story behind it. How did the Amiga come into play?

Rather accidentally. I got hooked on the Amiga a few years ago when the platform was already considered dead. I remember being awestruck by certain 'demos' back then. I got to see audiovisual real-time production on the Amiga, done by very talented people without the availability of graphics and soundboard enhancements. They were simply fascinating. So when I happened to have the chance to buy a low-cost A1200 a little later, I did.

Besides playing around with Trackers a little, I didn't do much with the Amiga until I was able to generate simple synthesiser sounds and little sequences by directly addressing / programming the Amiga's sound chip. I simply fell in love with the honest glitchy character of it – which was something completely different for me, a conventional musician used to only common synthesisers. It was actually my first step in sound creation with a computer (smiles).

Lucky you that Commodore, despite market and user-base demand, never bothered to change the sound chips of its Amiga product line. So your Amiga 1200 has the same sound chip as the first Amiga that came out in 1986.

I didn't even know that. Since I wasn't part of the Amiga community and never grew up with the platform, I was never really familiar with its hardware specifics and origin. True, a modification of "Paula" (the Amiga's sound chip) to include hi-fi qualities would certainly have affected my fascination with its specific 8-bit sound—if I would ever have had any to begin with.

How did you get the Amiga sound onto the album?

It started out very experimental around 5 years ago. I used SoftSnyth software to program different sounds with the Amiga and then simply recorded them with my YAMAHA A5000. The possibilities from there—playing the sounds polyphonic, using filters and effects—led to my first track, based only on these 8-bit samples. And it blew me away (smiles).

Which software / hardware did you use specifically?

I don't know the name of the Amiga software anymore, but the sequencer to record the notes was, as always, LOGIC. The sound-producing hardware simply included the Amiga 1200 as the sound source and one (!) Yamaha A5000 Sampler as the only instrument.

In the end, 4 to 8 channels went into the analogue mixer to be mixed, filtered and enhanced with some effects. The Hall effects especially didn't originate from the sampler, of course, but most other effects did.

Using this rather minimal equipment, I managed to create an entire album. Not more than 15MB of sample data were used in *Chiplandschaften*! While I could have used the whole range of my studio equipment, working just with the essentials, instead, was exciting and probably one of the reasons why this album sounds the way it does.

Did you consider any other SoftSynths (maybe even from other hardware platforms)?

While I was working on the first track, a software synthesiser called "QuadraSID" came out. It emulated the sound of the C64 pretty well. Although I'm very fond of SoftSynth, even today I stick to the concept of an album and never used it for *Chiplandschaften*.

Did you only process single samples and sounds on the Amiga or did you also track some patterns before sampling?

Mostly single sounds, but sometimes short sound sequences too. Those were not really planned, but simply resulted from playing around. There's this continuous 'processor thinking' loop in track 9 on the album, for example—elements like that can be found throughout the whole album. I used them specifically to roughen the bare sounds. If you cut them right, you'll end up with a friendly piece of 'current and glitch' (smiles).

Compared to other 8-bit sound chips aesthetics (like the C64's SID chip) the Amiga soundscapes work much more subtly. Is the association with the Amiga important to you?

I like the thought of people recognising the specific Amiga sound aesthetics, but that certainly wasn't intentional. From the very beginning, I used these unique 8-bit sounds for my vision of *Chiplandschaften* and wanted to merge them sweetly with 'modern' 16-bit hi-fi—the reason for the subline "8-bit meets 16-bit" on the album name in the early stages of production. Plus, throughout the whole production I was astonished again and again by how great the tracks turned out—yet they remained both independent and in line with the aesthetics of the characteristic Amiga sound.

What do you think about retrospective music movements like chip and micromusic?

Even though I'm not very familiar with them, I do like them a lot. Simply for the fact that in these subcultures and creative scenes, which are free of commercial pressure, music is based on attitude, conviction and passion—and leaves much more room to eventually create

truly artistic, new things which the mainstream benefits from in the end.

Chiplandschaften is your first album as JONSON. What came before that?

Since I've been making music for more than 25 years now, I've done quite a bit already. In terms of style, I've done everything but classical music. Working at studios and with musicians from early on has led to diverse projects, some of which have also hit the market.

But ever since I got hooked on electronic sounds (when I was around 10), I've never really got 'unhooked'. Instead, I experienced a growing fascination with electronic music over the years. That fascination formed the enthusiasm and inspiration that, in turn, created a range of electronic tracks – from atmospheric to experimental and abstract. And finally I ended up making *Chiplandschaften*.



JONSON

How come your album was released at Mikrolux?

That actually started with Waldorf Records a few years ago. I did a track for the *Zeitlos 2* compilation. Around that time my album had come along quite well and I talked to the Waldorf people about it. They were curious and expressed interest in the final version. When that was finished, their feedback was rather overwhelming. "This might even be something for Elektrolux / Mikrolux", they said. From then on it went back to a pretty normal 'release' story. I called up Elektrolux and all I heard was that they had no idea what I was talking about—at least not until they dug into the pile of demos and finally listened to it. I kept at it and a few weeks later I had my confirmation.

Any plans for JONSON live?

Not at all. I've always been more the studio kind of musician.

What's next after *Chiplandschaften*?

A number of things, I hope. After finishing *Chiplandschaften*—which took almost 2 years to be released—I didn't just sit around, but started on a new album pretty quickly called *p_composing*. It's already completed and waiting for release at Elektrolux. Recently I've also begun working on a third album. So JONSON is busy doing his thing.

Your record label refers to you as a 'computer fetishist'. Seriously, how much of a geek are you?

Actually, I've never liked the term 'fetishist'. Also the term 'computer' is probably too one-sided. But even though I have a conventional music background and love playing instruments, I'm definitely into electronic music. So the correct question would probably be: How geeky of a musician are you? Very geeky.

Chiplandschaften by JONSON was released at Mikrolux / Elektrolux in 2005.

Links:

www.mikrolux.com



IT'S ALL ABOUT THE GAME... MUSIC

NOSTALGIA WITH SUBSTANCE

by Larry Lontamer Oji <oji@sceen.org>

In a day and age where merely recycling the things that made childhood great is in fashion, the world of videogame music rearrangement aims to do one better. In the last half-decade, the awareness of these amateur music communities re-envisioning arguably timeless music has grown considerably. “OverClocked ReMix” (ocremix.org) leads the way in popularity and creativity.

Larry Lontamer Oji is the host of the weekly „VG Frequency“ radio show in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, covering music and activity in the video game music remixing scene.

OC ReMix didn't spawn out of nothing, however. The rearrangement of video game music had existed before OCR in the form of other throwback sites such as remix.kwed.org and c64audio.com that specialized in remixing some of the oldest of old videogames: the Commodore 64. But site creator David “*djpretzel*” Lloyd brought the idea of video game remixing a step further, hoping to promote the idea of tackling music from any and all eras of gaming. (Aside from Pong and Counterstrike!) “I wanted a site that would let SMS [Sega Master System] fans mix their favorite tracks, but at the same time, there was the C64 scene, and a good deal of great music on other platforms as well. As an SMS fan who felt... I don't know... “segregated” from the teeming hordes of Nintendo guys at the time, I wanted to make sure the platforms could be on equal footing on the site. Level the playing field, so to speak, and open it up to almost anything.”

After *djpretzel* initially launched the idea with about fifteen remixes (most of which were created by himself), the people started following. And at an average of 2 million pageviews per day, they've never stopped. The unorthodox yet appealing idea of recreating videogame music has attracted nearly 500 amateur musicians who frequently tackle compositions from Final Fantasy, Mega Man 2, Super Mario Bros. and other widely appealing game series. Yet the root of OCR rested with representing the underrepresented. “The site probably wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been one of the rare Sega Master System owners, outnumbered in a sea of NES fanatics, when I was 7 or 8,” *djpretzel* reveals. “Something about those

games specifically, and their music, I loved. Particularly SMS classics like Alex Kidd, Outrun, Space Harrier, and Shinobi, and the composers “Bo” [Tokuhiko Uwabo] and “Hiro” [Hiroshi Miyauchi]. Which is not to say NES music at the time wasn't great too, but an enigmatic quality to early SEGA games went a long way in inspiring a love of game music.”

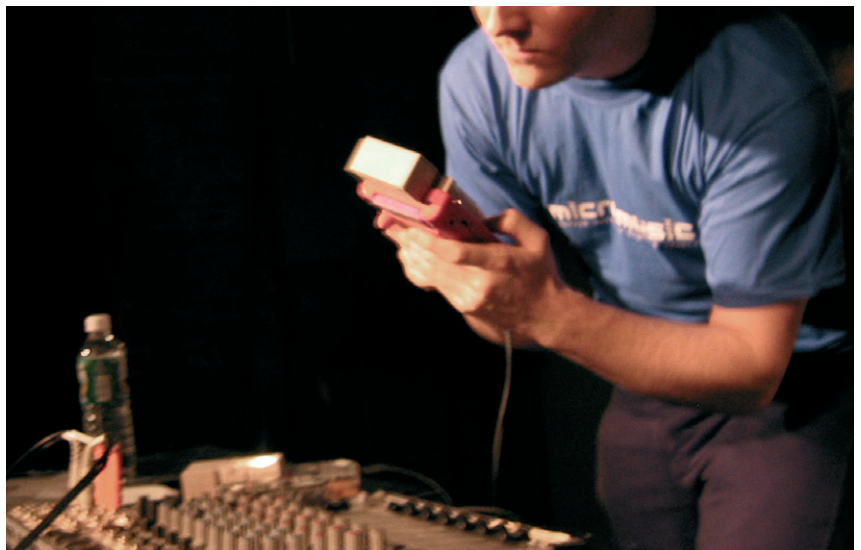
Sounds like a great idea if you've ever enjoyed playing Hang-On, or even other company's games like Nintendo's “Kung Fu” or even Martech's “Crazy Comets!” Yet the times of running any ambitious content-intensive website call for a genuine renaissance man. In the case of OC ReMix, *djpretzel* uses the opportunity as a means to further not only his musical skills, but database and web design skills. “I've always been a split personality, left-brain/right-brain kinda guy, so OCR lets me exercise writing, musical, and design skills, along with the database design and programmatic aspects. I learned XSLT, MYSQL, PHP and most of what I know about CSS in the process of multiple redesigns. With anything that you devote so much time on, you like to apply your skills to it.” The original plans for rolling out OverClocked ReMix called for a group effort but the task ultimately fell on *djpretzel*. Lloyd ended up taking a chance on running the entire show on his own. “For the record, I did try to get assistance from others, but working via email and IRC and dealing with scheduling issues became too burdensome, and I finally just decided to try it myself,” *djpretzel* recalls. “It'd probably be better for... redundancy, at least, if the site was administered and programmed by a

team, with various strengths to contribute. But I'm picky about ownership and am a perfectionist on certain things, plus I'm greedy - I like working on it."

The major factor that has gone into making OCR the center of the game arrangement community has been the selectivity of the site in accepting new tracks to spotlight. While running the website falls under djpretzel's direction, the one area where he's allowed others to play a major part is in critiquing the submissions that arrive daily in his inbox. Assessing the performance, production and overall creativity of many of the submissions rest on the site's judges panel. Made up of experienced VG remix critics, the judges panel has improved the quality standards of the site in the past few years to the point where it's become an honor for many aspiring VG remixers to have their tracks approved. That level of selectivity has been a point of contention for many who feel the standards of acceptance at OC have become too high. "The panel and the process by which remixes are chosen [for] the OCR canon is often the main point of dispute from either those who don't understand the system, don't agree with the creative guidelines or simply those who are disappointed by the rejection," explains Gray "GrayLightning" Alexander, audio engineer and musician by trade and an OCR judge for over a year.

As within any artistic community, the tensions can run high when people's works have the potential to be negatively critiqued and scrutinized. Nonetheless, the overall vibe from GrayLightning is a positive one, highlighting how increasing quality standards haven't been exclusionary. "Debates and creative differences will always exist, especially in an artistic community like ours. Some feel the standards are out of reach, but the panel and djpretzel with years of experience and a good feel for the tempo of the scene do a good job of finding a balance between high standards and accessibility. The facts bear this out as there are always new mixers that don't necessarily have years of instrumental or academic training that are able to create sonically pleasing and inventive music." Indeed, with an average of 12 to 15 remixes being posted to OC ReMix per month, there doesn't seem to be any shortage of well-received material inspired by a multitude of videogame soundtracks making the rounds there. Gray offers some words of encouragement for prospective remixers, summing up how the selectivity of OCR appeals to artistic innovation as well the insatiable demand of the VG remix fanbase. "With hard work and dedication, a notable number of even previously rejected mixers have shown the capacity to get over the proverbial bar. In this regard, I think we do a good job satisfying both listener and creative demands."

Slide on over to ocremix.org in order to check out videogame music as reinterpreted through the minds of scores of talented amateur artists!



Devided by Zero: micromusic tour of Holland

Text: Lektrogirl, Photos: Wang

Holland—clogs, tulips and dope. Here is something a bit more interesting I bet you didn't know about the place, one of the world's most famous Commodore SID composers, Jeroen "Maniacs of Noise" Tel, is a native. Who can forget the themes to Turbo Outrun, Kinetix and Cybernoid if you spent your younger days playing on the Commodore64, in between episodes of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles on TV?

It makes perfect sense then, that the Dutch micromusic_hq, Julian van Aalderen who is a dedicated micromusic producer and renowned 8-bit VJ and Jeroen van de Boogerd, promoter, is organising a tour around the country in May featuring artists who are composing this style of music from the micromusic.net community.

Julian van Aalderen, also known as poke 1,170 made his decision on which artists to pick for the tour pragmatically, "I picked the artists by my personal favour." Van Aalderen goes on to explain why he loves his choices so much; "Lo-Bat [Belgium] for square millimetre Gameboy programming, Komatrohn [Sweden] for electro pop music, Lektrogirl [UK] for her unique pick of catchy Italo, chip stuff and whatever the world forgot about, Psilodumper's [Sweden] rich imagination and firstARTer's [Germany] ever appealing live performances that crowds simply won't forget." And the co-organisers van Aalderen and van de Boogerd will be VJing and DJing as well.

Van Alderen is confident that the shows will knock the socks off crowds in the Holland, going on the reaction of the people at the previous events he has organised. "Dutch people are opened minded to experimental music and so to chiptune music. People like to dance to good electronic music of whatever kind."

DIVIDED BY ZERO Tour:

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PSILODUMPUTER [SWE], BITSHIFTER [USA],
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DJ: LEKTROGIRL [UK] POLAR B [NL]
VJ: THE C-MEN [NL]

11 May 05 : Amsterdam

PARADISO, Weteringschans 6-8, <http://www.paradiso.nl>

12 May 05 : Rotterdam

NIGHTTOWN, Westkruiskade 26-28, <http://www.nighttown.nl>

14 May 05 : Deventer

BURGWERWEESHUIS, Bagijnenstraat 9, <http://www.burgerweeshuis.nl>

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